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FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

ILLUSTRATED

IN THE

LIFE OF ABRAHAM:

A SERIES OF DISCOURSES
PREACHED IN ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, EVERTON;

BY
THE REV. R. P. BUDDICOM, M.A. F.A.S.
MINISTER OF THAT CHURCH, AND LATE FELLOW
OF QUEEN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

VOL. I.

PUBLISHED BY R. B. SEELEY AND W. BURNSIDE;
AND SOLD BY L. AND G. SEELEY,
FLEET STREET, LONDON.
MDCCCXXXIX.

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TO

THE CONGREGATION

OF

ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, EVERTON.

My dear Friends,

A large proportion of the years usually allotted to the life of man have gone by, since I introduced some portions of ministerial labour to public notice, under the same sanction, which I now seek for the following pages. Since that time, many of those, unto whom it was my privilege to preach, in whatever weakness and inability, the unsearchable riches of Christ, have passed into the invisible world; but their kindness and affection are fresh in the memory of my heart. To those who sur-

vive, as to you all, I am still bound by ties of undiminished interest, and claims upon undiminished gratitude. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh:" but the same friendliness and regard from both have been extended to me. "Having obtained help of God, I continue unto this day." Allow me therefore to request you will accept the dedication of these volumes to you, as a sincere. though feeble testimony of that grateful and cordial attachment with which I remain,

Your affectionate Pastor and Friend, in the Truth of Jesus, and in the Fellowship of His Church,

R. P. BUDDICOM.

PREFACE.

THE *Precepts* and *Promises* of Scripture, glowing throughout its pages with brightness derived from the Sun of Righteousness, who is the Author and End of both, receive additional lustre from the *Examples* of Holy Writ. Those examples exhibit, as it were, a substance which renders all the doctrinal parts of the word of God more real and apprehensible by the mind. The historical portions of the Bible, therefore, which shew forth, not only the vicissitudes of nations, but condescend to the dealing of God with individuals, are peculiarly instructive. They embody those revelations of his will, which the Most High has made to man, instead of leaving them to be regarded as abstract de-

clarations of divine truth. The power of temptation, acting upon the sinful bias of a fallen nature, and applied with every advantage of skill and efficiency, as well as every suggestion of malignity, by the unrelenting enemy of God and man, is exhibited in the inspired record, to warn us of the peril in which we stand. The doctrines which enlighten,—the precepts which guide,—the omnipotent spiritual agency which upholds or restores,—the invitations which attract,—and the inviolable engagements of divine faithfulness, which at once encourage us to holiness, and transform us into the divine likeness, are thus exhibited, by a kind of personification, humanly speaking more effective than any thing merely didactic could offer. The All-wise God thus declares his will, shews how practically it has been fulfilled or contradicted; and brings before us instances the most delightful or solemn, of the consequences that flow from duty or disobedience.

Human nature has been substantially the same in all ages and in all climates of the world. Elias was not more absolutely a man of like passions with those whom the Apostle James addressed, than with ourselves. The family likeness through all generations is unquestion-

able, however some of the features may be modified in the individuals who compose the great family of man. The genus is one, although the many species into which it is divided may have their characteristic distinctions. Whether we regard the highest or the lowest extreme of intellectual being—those, over whom philosophy, learning, and science have shed their most powerful lights, or those who are enchained in the darkest and most debasing fetters of ignorance, the whole offspring of fallen Adam is naturally under the influence and motive power of that carnal mind which is enmity against God. While therefore, the physical character of man is so exceedingly diversified, and his mental circumstances those of such continual change, the same spiritual truths and impulses (which in the revelation of God bore upon his heart and character, when salvation was first preached, to correct and remove the guilt, impotence, and misery, wherein the original lapse from righteousness had placed him, and to restore him to the divine image, with all its gracious and glorious privileges) still exist, and must be equally applicable to his state, until the end of the world.

One class of motives, rules, and aims, has in-

variably swayed the children of God. And the very opposite class has influenced and guided the children of this world, for nearly six thousand years, whether through the dimmer light of the Patriarchal and Levitical economy, or through the full-orbed splendour of the Gospel day. The one bow down and worship, each man the idol of his physical, mental, or moral constitution with intense and devoted constancy: the other esteems Christ as all, and in all.

The great principle of all true and inward holiness is FAITH—"the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It is that victorious grace, which at once attests the presence and power of the life of God in the soul of man. Whatever examples, therefore, of this grace we find most illustrious in the Sacred Record, are those which we should diligently ponder, and endeavour, in the might of God to imitate; whether the patterns died just before the canon of Revelation was closed, or much farther upwards in the stream of time.

Now, no child of Adam hath ever more steadfastly endured, as seeing Him who is invisible, than the PATRIARCH ABRAHAM. He may be regarded, in trials undergone, and tri-

umphs achieved, as the great Representative of true religion among the elder saints of God. The story of his life is so deeply instructive, and the witness of the Holy Ghost is so unequivocally given to him, that we may well understand why St. Paul (Heb. xi.) should only mention two especial instances of faith in the old world—Abel and Enoch—and that of Noah in the world restored, in order that he may hasten to dwell with admiration and delight upon the devoted confidence of the FRIEND OF GOD. Abraham stands almost at the head of that great cloud of witnesses, by whom the Christian is compassed about: and whose presence is noted, as one of the reasons why he should "lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset him, and run with patience the race that is set before him, looking unto Jesus."

The lives of pious ancestors are the property of their children; not as heir-looms, in which they may glory, while themselves have in all good things greatly degenerated from the models bequeathed them: but as examples to stimulate and provoke them to a holy jealousy. The lives of God's saints, enshrined in his word, are in like manner the property of the church;

not as mere objects of speculative wonder and respect; but of humble yet zealous imitation. Such examples are given, in order that the members of Christ's Holy Catholic Church may become "followers of them who through faith and patience have inherited the promises." In this important view—the view wherein every similar instance should be regarded, the example of Abraham is exceedingly precious. It may therefore, well justify a minister of religion, in bringing it with much copiousness before his hearers, and in endeavouring to impress it upon their hearts, precept upon precept, and line upon line.

Another reason may also be given for that kind of consecutive preaching, of which an instance is given in the following pages. There is a *mannerism* in preaching, as well as in painting, which if left uncorrected, (and it is not easy to apply the remedy,) tends greatly to contract the horizon of spiritual truth in the mind of a clergyman, and hinders him from making full proof of his ministry, by declaring "the whole counsel of God." He has some favourite truths and topics which recur almost insensibly to his mind; at first by the force of inclination, and afterwards by the power of

habit; until at length they become invested with an interest which absorbs all other; thus hindering him from treading the circle of an enlarged and enlightened theology. He has some cherished system of divinity, which he deems it necessary, on all occasions, to advance and enforce. He has a class of texts which he regards as supremely important: and the book of Revelation is graduated in his mind, like certain Bibles published not very remotely, wherein the chapters were numbered, according to a scale of relative importance, to which they were applied. Every clergyman must have felt this temptation to narrow the ground of his pulpit ministrations; to rest with delight by the wells, and under the palm trees of his own Elim, and to regard all other Scripture as comparatively barren. They are happy who have least powerfully felt this temptation; or rather who have most resolutely and fervently, and therefore most successfully, prayed and struggled against it.

Perhaps one of the most practicable modes of avoiding or overcoming it, is to abstain occasionally from the consideration of detached passages of Scripture, in unconnected sermons; by studying and expounding a consecutive and

entire portion of the divine word. The mind of the Holy Ghost may probably be thus more effectually exhibited. Prejudices and prepossessions are thus corrected: and the whole truth of God is more fully elicited, than upon any other system. A consideration of the motives and conduct of those whose memories are embalmed in the Bible, can hardly fail, under divine influence, of being, in some degree, beneficial to the minister's own mind, as well as of enabling him to open upon his hearers, a more copious stream of divine truth, than he could otherwise draw from its pure and inexhaustible fountain.

Under this conviction I was induced several years ago to arrange the plan of a course of sermons upon the life and character of Abraham. A variety of circumstances prevented me from executing this design for a considerable time. While the work was actually in progress, I was compelled by ill health to be absent, nearly a year, from England. On my return it was resumed, and only finished a few months ago. I have some reason to hope, that in the mercy of God, it has not been altogether in vain to those over whom I am called to watch, as one that must give account to Him. I am there-

fore encouraged, in dependence upon Him, to to bring this series of Discourses before the public. It may well be asked, why the determination was taken to follow out the pulpit by the press, when this department of the fruitful field of Scriptural Biography has been so well occupied by the Rev. Henry Hunter, and the Rev. Thomas Robinson; and more recently by the Rev. Henry Blunt, in his "Twelve Lectures on the History of Abraham?" I answer, that with all their excellencies, especially those of the two latter, they yet seemed to have left a few ears "of the corn of heaven," after their own rich harvest, even for so poor a gleaner as myself, which might be bound up in a little sheaf, as another sincere, however unworthy offering to the Church of God. I may add, that my own plan had been formed before the publication of Mr. Blunt's very interesting volume, and indeed before I was at all aware of his intention.

It was difficult, perhaps impracticable, at least without greater tact and resources than I could bring to the attempt, to avoid considerable repetition of sentiment, and even of language in many parts of these volumes. The mode of treating the subject appears to me,

even now, almost to involve this necessity; before which, however, I may very possibly have given way with too much facility. Simplicity, truth, and usefulness, have been my objects throughout: and I have not scrupled to resign any advantage which a more studied and elaborate variety might have afforded me, in order to advance these great ends of all ministerial labour.

The present day, in which an unscriptural and unbelieving expediency so awfully usurps the place of divine authority, and enwraps men in selfishness, as it extends its sway over their hearts, seems pre-eminently to demand the inculcation of that simple and confiding faith, which rests implicitly upon the truth of Jehovah; acknowledges his absolute sovereignty over the affairs of men, and needs no other motive of action than the declaration, "Thus saith the Lord."

That faith, purifying the heart, working by love, and overcoming the world, is, as I have already said, beautifully exemplified in the history of Abraham. If any light shall be thrown by the following pages upon this cardinal grace of true religion; and if thereby any aspiration of heart should be felt by a single reader of

them to possess it more largely, and exercise it more vigorously, I do most earnestly beg an interest in that reader's prayers, that I may much more effectually than heretofore, realize what I have endeavoured to describe, through the remainder of my pilgrimage.

R. P. B.

Everton, 1839.

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SERMON I.

THE HEIRS OF PROMISE.

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IF YE BE CHRIST'S, THEN ARE YE ABRAHAM'S SEED, AND HEIRS ACCORDING TO THE PROMISE.

IN that universal charter of grace, wherewith God has enriched his Church, the ministers of the everlasting Gospel are not only included, but particularized. Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and their successors, the ambassadors for Christ, with their intellectual and spiritual attainments, their trials, experiences, consolations, and labours of love, are substantial parts of this all-comprehending inheritance. Even such a portion has the Christian in every Saint, of whom the Scriptures have borne record, whether under the Old or New Testament. Assuredly those judgments which befel the offending Israelites in the wilderness, "*happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world*

are come."[1] It is equally certain, that those elders, who through faith obtained a good report, had this high testimony of the Spirit, not merely for their own peace and joy in believing, but also, that their examples might serve as guides and landmarks to the Church, through all its history. They form an important part of that great cloud of witnesses who compass about the faithful soldiers and servants of Jesus Christ, in their gracious warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Being dead, they yet speak. They bear testimony to the unsearchable riches of mercy in the covenant of redemption; to the unchangeable faithfulness of its surety, Jesus Christ, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;" and to the Almighty power of God the Holy Ghost, whereby they were "kept, through faith unto salvation." It is a Christian's duty, when reading the histories of these saints, to follow them by faith within the vail; and to see the happiness of their state, while awaiting the resurrection of the just, at the second coming of their Lord. They were men who "through faith and patience have inherited the promises." And their testimony is given to the intent that, "*laying aside every*

[1] 1 Cor. x. 11.

weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, we should run with patience the race that is set before us, (if indeed we have entered upon the spiritual course,) *looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith: who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame; and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*" [1]

Among these elder saints, of whom the world was not worthy, the Patriarch Abraham occupies a distinguished place. The Holy Scriptures have invested him with titles and relations the most illustrious and important. They have described him as *the father of the faithful,—the friend of God,—the covenant representative of that Incarnate Word who is the Fœderal Head of the whole household of God,—the chosen parent, in whose seed all the families of the earth should be blessed.* Were he however to be exhibited only under these aspects, he would be invested with so large a measure, not only of superiority, but of abstraction, as to appear removed beyond the sphere of ordinary sympathies. He would therefore become an object of admiration, rather than a mean of practical usefulness to the church, as one of the loftiest examples of faith

[1] Heb. xii. 1, 2.

and holiness. But mark the graciousness and consideration of divine wisdom in the revelation of mercy to man! In the "great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh," we have not only "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;" but a Saviour invested with all the needful sympathies of our nature. He can therefore be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, for that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted. That very Redeemer, who in his divine nature is one with the Father over all, God blessed for evermore, wept, in the depth of human feelings, over the grave of a friend; and commended his mother to the disciple whom He loved, in the last agony of his passion. We have the preciousness of his atonement, for the pardon of sin; of his obedience, as the perfect righteousness of every believer; of his Spirit, as the Sanctifier and Comforter of the Church; and the blessed example of his most holy life, to direct the goings of its members heavenward. Even so in the case of Abraham. He is not only a man highly dignified of God, and mystically related to the heirs of salvation, but he has a peculiar claim upon the regard of all Christians, as perhaps the chief of those eminent saints who trod the pilgrimage of grace in the

twilight of its day, "*before the Sun of Righteousness arose upon the world with healing in his wings.*"[1] His eventful life is a beautiful realization of the principle of faith, whereby alone man can live to God, and do his will. He is an instance, the most animating, of its power, its walk, its trials, and its victories. We behold in him divine history teaching by a noble example; and the precept of the Holy Ghost practically illustrated by the conduct of one in whom He truly dwelled.

It is my purpose, therefore, in dependance on the divine blessing, to undertake a series of discourses upon the life and character of this devoted servant of God. I commence his portraiture in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. Join with me in supplication, that my feebleness may be strengthened, my ignorance enlightened, my confined and unworthy views of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory enlarged. Plead for me at the throne of grace, that the storehouse may be made by the Holy Ghost more capacious to hold the bread of life, and the steward more faithful to distribute it among you!

The text has been selected, as furnishing, out of the argument of which it forms a part,

[1] Mal. iv. 2.

the most undeniable proof, that every one who professes the gospel of a crucified Saviour in sincerity and truth, has an immediate and personal interest in the history of this illustrious believer; and that too, an interest the most momentous, because it is spiritual and gracious. "*If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*" Holy Spirit of God, the unerring Teacher of all who seek Thee, open our eyes that we may understand, and our hearts, that we may receive thy word!

The subject obviously divides itself into two particulars,

I. THE SUPPOSITION MADE. *If ye be Christ's.*

II. THE CONCLUSION DRAWN. *Then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

We proceed then to examine briefly, THE APOSTLE'S SUPPOSITION. It is a view equally chilling, unsatisfactory, and unscriptural, to regard St. Paul's assumption as merely referring to a moral imitation of our Lord's temper of mind, holiness, and purity,—a kind of dim and distant connexion between Himself and his disciples, made visible only by the slight resemblance which may exist between persons

of somewhat similar habits and pursuits. If language can speak clearly at all, it certainly speaks here of propriety,—of a close and endearing interest possessed by the Redeemer in those whom St. Paul addresses. Similar forms of expression, and obviously with similar meaning abound in his Epistles. "*Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's.*"[1] "*All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*"[2]

Now mark the whole course of this inexpressibly blessed assurance. Every thing, whether in nature or in grace, is the absolute and unquestionable property of those who are "*washed, sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*"[3] And what constitutes the reason of the grant, and the validity of the rich endowment? The interest which Christ hath in them, and the interest which God hath in Christ. Is this an interest of imitation, or of right and possession? The chain is perfect in all its links: and God be praised, that it cannot be

[1] Romans xiv. 8. [2] 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23. [3] 1 Cor. vi. 11.

broken by any of those cold and comfortless interpretations, whose authors seem to enjoy a perverse satisfaction in lowering and chilling the spiritual tone of religion among us. The scriptural assurance of identity between the Bridegroom and the bride, the Head and the members, the Vine and the branches, is a rock of immovable refuge to a Christian's hope: "*I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one: and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved me.*"[1]

If the infallible guidance of Scripture be taken to direct us, we shall find no difficulty in determining to whom this high distinction belongs. We may easily discover who are thus numbered among the saints of God for glory everlasting. They have been given by the Father to his Son, in the mediatorial character which He assumed for the world's salvation; that He might restore them from their lapsed and lost condition in sin and condemnation;—that He might once again impress upon them the image of God, and readmit them to the family of heaven;—that He might see in them of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. "*Thine they were, and Thou gavest them unto Me.*"[2] He received them at the

[1] John xvii. 23. [2] Ibid xvii. 6.

Father's hand, in that eternal engagement of his love, whereby He undertook to raise up in them a temple to Himself, from the dust and ruin of the fall; and to make them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. He undertook their otherwise hopeless cause, as a community of property and possession, wherein both his Father and Himself might have a perpetual interest of complacency and delight. He engaged to remove the guilt they would incur, by its assumption upon Himself, in virtue of his one oblation of Himself once offered, as the one full and perfect satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; to maintain their cause by an unceasing and prevailing advocacy on their behalf in the court of heaven; to sanctify them, body, soul, and spirit, by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost; to leave no work for them imperfect and undone. He pledged Himself to persevere in these unfathomably mysterious offices of love, until God in Him, having accomplished the number of his elect, and made ready his kingdom, He should say as its everlasting Administrator, "*Those whom thou gavest me have I kept. All mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.*"[1] He covenanted,

[1] John xvii. 10,11.

not only to bring in an everlasting righteousness, which should be unto all, and upon all them that believe; but to dwell in their hearts by his Holy Spirit; and by the almighty energy of his grace, there to unlock the springs of that holiness, whereby they might adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things, and without which no man shall see the Lord. 'Participation,' saith the judicious Hooker, 'is that mutual inward hold which Christ hath of us, and we of Him, in such sort that each possesseth other by way of interest, property, and inherent copulation. We are in God through Christ eternally, according to that intent and purpose whereby we are chosen to be made his in this present world, before the world itself was made. We are in God, through the knowledge which is had of us, and the love which is borne towards us from everlasting. But—our being in Christ by eternal foreknowledge, saveth us not without our actual and real adoption into the fellowship of his saints into this present world. We are therefore adopted sons of God to eternal life by participation of the only begotten Son of God, whose life is the wellspring and cause of ours. It is too cold an interpretation whereby some men expound our being in Christ to import nothing else but only that the self-same nature

which maketh us to be men is in Him, and maketh Him man, as we are. For what man in the world is there, that hath not so far forth communion with Jesus Christ? The church is in Christ, as Eve was in Adam. Yea, by grace we are every one of us in Christ, and in his church, as by nature we were in those our first parents.'[1]

Contemplate especially *The Price* paid by the Son of God when He bore the overwhelming load of human transgression in his own body on the tree; when it pleased the Lord to bruise Him, and to make his soul an offering for sin. And this view being taken, we may ask whether in those who are Christ's He may not challenge a right of purchase for an interest mutual and interchangeable between them and Himself; immeasurably more close and endearing than could be imagined on the ground of discipleship alone, could that connection be separated from the other relations in which every believer must stand to his Lord? "*Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.*"[2] "*Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price.*"[3]

[1] Hooker, Eccl. Pol. v. 56.

[2] 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. [3] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

Are we Christ's? *Then we have given ourselves to Him in a full and voluntary surrender.* Then it is the joy and gladness of our enlightened will, corrected judgment, and sanctified affections, to say, each in his individual experience, "*I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine.*"[1] Then He is welcomed to the heart in all his offices of salvation, and all the glory of his double nature. Then, although the votaries of an unbelieving world, the sceptics who idolize a vain and infidel philosophy, bearing the same resemblance to the Gospel of Jesus, as the rudest image bears to the living, thinking, feeling man, see no beauty in Him why they should desire Him, his people are made willing to receive Him in the day of his power over their hearts. They own Him as their Lord, and adore Him as their God. His new name will be written in their minds. He will be the living centre of all attractiveness to their desires. It will be their joy and best delight to have fellowship with Him; here in his word, his way, his promises, his comforts, nay in his reproaches and persecutions; as well as hereafter, in the kingdom of his glory. His Gospel hath an effectual might to transform them into his image,

[1] Song of Sol. vi. 3.

and make them anxious to perfect holiness in the fear of God. And if the Gibeonites, when delivered from the sword, were willing to become hewers of wood, and drawers of water to the congregation, so are they whom the Saviour hath rescued from the utter death of sin, and reconciled in will to God, making peace between them, not only contented, but joyful to glorify God in the calls of that service which is perfect freedom. "*The love of Christ constraineth them; because they thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they who live, should not live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again.*"[1] The devils are his vassals; the wicked of this world are his prisoners. The faithful dependents upon his person and merit are his subjects and followers, in all the unrivalled preference of their hearts' affection. They are his jewels, his brethren, his sons, they are his by every title of endearment that can be named or imagined.

And therefore, it may be added, they *are his by a mystical and perfect union*—members of his body, of his flesh, of his bones; animated by one soul, and constituting one body; for

[1] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

"*he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.*"[1] This union then, is not a mere union of love and affection; as we speak of a friend being to us another self. Such a oneness of heart and desire does indeed exist been the Redeemer and his members, between the Vine and the branches: but this partakes of a still higher nature. That is a *moral*, this a *mystical* oneness. That engages our affections; this joins our very persons to the Lord. "*The church is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.*"[1] Here is the dignity, here the excellence, here the security, here the sanctification, here the hope that maketh not ashamed; here the unsealed and open fountains of a joy unspeakable and full of glory. For if we thus are Christ's, then doth He care for us, as the Good Shepherd for his sheep. Then doth his Father, the great Husbandman, prune the branch of the true Vine that it may bear fruit. Then will He spare us in the hour of judgment and visitation, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then will He intercede for us, *that if* "*any sin we may have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*"[2] Then will He teach us as we are able to bear the lessons of his love;

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 17. [2] 1 John ii. 1.

and give rest to our souls in the instruction. Then will He rebuke our wanderings with gentle chastisement, and restore us in pity to his fold. Then will He guide us with his counsel, and afterward receive us to glory.

It may now be asked, *What are the privileges of this happy state?* If nothing can separate the members from the body, then, what shall separate Christians from the love of Christ? If in virtue of this union they have an interest in all that He possesses, what, except their own restraint in prayer instead of the open-heartedness of filial pleading and petition, can prevent them from being filled with all the fulness of God? If He is their Shepherd, how can they want? If they have communion with Him, as the bride with her Husband, how high their distinctions, how inestimably rich their dowry! If they have been planted together in the likeness of his death, how surely also in the likeness of his resurrection! If they have been made kings and priests unto God, in virtue of that communion, and of his double office, how infallibly shall they sit on his throne, and serve in his temple world without end! If their *worst* things are his, even their sins which He hath accounted his own, taken upon Himself by imputation, and hidden from the eye of

a sin-avenging God, as in the depths of the sea, how securely may they rest in the persuasion that these iniquities, mourned over, hated, and forsaken, shall not be laid to their charge! If in all their afflictions He is afflicted—if He bore their griefs, and carried their sorrows—if He is reviled in their reproaches, and hath the unfailing kindness of an intimate sympathy in all their sufferings, how needfully must the light affliction which is but for a moment, work for them a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory! If on the other hand, they have communion with Him in their *best* things—(every one of them derived, and only derivable from that fulness which filleth all in all) then must all that good be sure and perfect. Their temporal mercies will be real blessings, in the covenant of their Father's love,—streams from the nether springs of his providential goodness; and yet communicating by mysterious channels with the unfathomable depths of the upper springs, in his kindness towards them through Christ Jesus. Their instatement in spiritual mercies may never be successfully challenged. A violated law cannot condemn them; for they are made the righteousness of God in Christ. Satan may plead against them, as the unwearied accuser of the brethren; but their cause hath

been undertaken by Him who hath already bruised the serpent's head. Satan may claim to pay them the wages of sin, eternal death: but the dreadful hire, which this great enemy would not only tender, but force upon them, will be put aside by God, who hath, both by power and by price, bestowed upon them that gift of his own grace which is eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. If their fellowship be with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, the transforming and sanctifying efficacy of that communion will certainly be imparted. "*Beholding with open face as in a glass the glory of the Lord, they will be changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*" "*The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, who is one with their spirit, will make them free from the law of sin and death. They are dead, and their life is hid with Christ in God; and when Christ who is their life shall appear, then shall they also appear with Him in glory.*"[1]

I defer *the conclusion to be drawn from the Apostle's supposition* to another occasion. But I would appeal to you whether, if these things be so, there should be rest to our souls in any

[1] 2 Cor. iii. 18. Rom. viii. 2. Col. iii. 3, 4.

peradventure touching a point so momentous, as the spiritual union between every believer, and the glorious object of his faith? *If ye be Christ's*—? The decision of the question involves nothing vain or trivial, for it is our life; or rather it involves the awful alternative of life or death eternal. He who believeth not is without part in the Saviour and salvation of God's revealed word. He is condemned already by that law which he has broken, and by that gospel which he is neglecting. He is grievously sinning against all his baptismal privileges; and his "*circumcision will be accounted to him for uncircumcision.*" [1]

And is this a condition wherein one who professes to receive the Scriptures, and to use them as the mirror wherein to behold his circumstances, his obligations, his duties, and his prospects, should be contented to dwell? "*What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God.*" [2] If ye be not Christ's—his subjects, his property, his members, the abodes of his saving power, and the dwelling places of his grace, by whom are ye vanquished, owned, and tenanted? And shall not this tremendous covenant with eternal death, and with the grave

[1] Rom. ii. 25. [2] Jonah i. 6.

of every hope be annulled? He only can break it, unto whom all power in heaven and earth is given, to be the Deliverer of doomed, and dying men. While He proclaims your imminent and infinite peril, as plainly as the truth of the Holy Ghost can utter it, are we not commissioned to invite you to behold in Him "*the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world?*"[1] Are we not to beseech you in his stead, to take refuge in Him from the penalty and power, the guilt and misery of your transgressions? Our preaching is but the faint echo of his own voice. "*Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*"[2] "*Turn ye then, turn ye, for why will ye die?*"

Are these things so? Are blessings such as I have mentioned, blessings more than angels, whatever may be the depth of angelic desire or the spaciousness of angelic intellect, could fully look into or comprehend, linked to the happy distinction of being Christ's? Then what manner of persons ought ye to be who profess this hope, as the glorious hope of your calling? "*He that saith he abideth in the Saviour, ought also himself so to walk, even as He walked.*" "*They that are Christ's, have cru-*

[1] John i. 29. [2] Ibid vi. 37.

cified the flesh, with its affections and lusts."[1] Judge therefore yourselves brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord. Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves. If the Lord of life and glory has indeed a property in you unto salvation, then is He the great allurement of your hearts, the supreme desire of your affections. Then will it be your chief delight to serve Him. You will labour to "*cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*"[2] The door of your hearts, through which the Prince hath entered will be closed against the willing admission of any idol god to rival Him, or usurp his throne in that sanctuary.[3] *Dwell then in love: for* "*he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.*"[4] *If ye live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit.*[5] And while you rejoice in all the extent of blessing, and all the magnificence of hope which this mutual inhabitancy involves, keep your eyes fixed upon that city which hath foundations whose Builder and Maker is God—which his word has described under so many images of material splendour, all to be infinitely and eternally surpassed by the

[1] 1 John ii. 6. Gal. v. 24. [2] 2 Cor. vii. 1. [3] Ezek. xliv. 3.
[4] 1 John iv. 16. [5] Gal. v. 25.

reality;—the wall of jasper, the pavement of gold, the gates of pearl, the foundations of precious stones; and, (to crown the whole,) the Lord its everlasting light, and the Lamb its glory.

SERMON II.

THE HEIRS OF PROMISE.

GALATIANS III. 29.

IF YE BE CHRIST'S, THEN ARE YE ABRAHAM'S SEED, AND HEIRS ACCORDING TO THE PROMISE.

IT was not the least among many wonderful peculiarities of the Gospel, that its mighty salvation should be preached to the Gentiles, not in the first instance by converts, whom the Holy Spirit had made among themselves, but by Jews, who held them to be accursed, and would gladly have thrust them beyond the pale of mercy. Out of the very people, who would have locked up the kingdom of heaven from them, and cast the key of it into the depths of the sea, where a Gentile might never find it, men were raised up, who threw it open as entirely, in all its extent of divine love, as the Holy of Holies was made accessible, when the vail of the temple was rent in twain, at the Redeemer's death. Here was in itself a strong and happy

presumption to the aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, that the salvation of God was indeed intended for them. And when St. Paul, especially commissioned to be the Apostle of the Gentiles, shewed how the middle wall of partition had been broken down, it became clear that "*the Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of the Spirit's promise in Christ by the Gospel.*[1]

This cheering assurance of absolute irrespectiveness on the part of God, is continually brought forward in the Apostle's preaching and Epistles. He labours, as it were, to shew to those who might otherwise have doubted it, the Saviour's gracious impartiality; even as He Himself stated it to the Jews—"*Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring with Me, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd.*"[2] It is his high delight to testify, as loudly as to any other Scriptural truth, that "*there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ all and in all,*[3] among the members of his renewed church. In like manner does he address the converts of Galatia. He

[1] Ephes. iii. 6. [2] John x. 16. [3] Coloss. iii. 11.

testifies by arguments the most invincible, that every blessing bestowed by God upon Abraham, in absolute mercy, through faith, was equally the property of any believer, whether descended by natural birth from the friend of God, or nationally a stranger to him and his posterity. "*If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*"

I have endeavoured to shew you what the supposition in the text implied; and the extent of blessed meaning involved in the emphatic term, "*If ye be Christ's.*"

I now proceed to consider, for the believer's furtherance and joy of faith,

II. The Conclusion deduced from this supposition. *If ye be Christs' then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.* It is sufficiently clear, that in the literal meaning of the terms, this statement could not be true. The Galatians had no portion among the natural and national kindred of the father of the faithful. From any distinctions arising out of these relations, they were as much severed, as if Judæa and Galatia had been placed at opposite extremities of the world. We are consequently compelled to give the Apostle's words their plain meaning, by a spiritual inter-

pretation. Indeed it would have been a poor and mean ambition to have wished for merely civil and ecclesiastical adoption into the family of Abraham after the flesh, on the part of those, who being Christ's, by the Father's gift, the weighty purchase of the cross, their baptismal investiture, their mystical union with the Saviour's body, and their own gracious surrender, possessed in these distinctions the highest honour, and the deepest sources of happiness, which man can enjoy. But it was another matter, one of dear and delightful interest, one to which they might well aspire, to be thus made partakers of all the spiritual blessings possessed by Abraham, as a spiritual man, and made over to all his spiritual descendants. To this point of joy and consolation the Apostle labours to bring the Galatians, in the argument before us, which closely resembles that used by him in the 4th Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. And we learn from it, that

1. *Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are the spiritual seed of Abraham.*

The patriarch stands in two, and those widely different relations to his posterity. He is the parent of a natural offspring, sons and daughters; the father of many nations. Among them were

the children of the bond-woman, even of Hagar, who were not to be partakers of his name and substance. Among them, moreover, were all his children by Sarah,—the whole nation of the Jews,—merely considered as acknowledging him to be their natural father, but having no interest in the spiritual mercies vouchsafed to him; because they had no moral and spiritual resemblance to him as their father, believing and justified of God, and therefore no portion in the blessings of his God as believers. Among them were some who cried concerning Abraham's Saviour, on whom his heart had leaned for mercy almost two thousand years before He appeared on earth, "Crucify Him, crucify Him: his blood be upon us, and upon our children." And while they boasted of their high progenitor, (as well they might, if they had wisely boasted,) "we have Abraham for our father," the Lord rebuked the empty pride that condemned themselves; and shewed them what they really were, not according to the genealogies of men, of which birth and burial embrace the little all, but according to the state wherein their unbelief placed them before God, "*If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. Ye are of*

your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do."[1]

I said, it was no mean prerogative to be born from such an ancestor: for when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, "*He took not on Himself the nature of angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham.*" "*Of him as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is God over all, blessed for ever.*"[2] But while their hearts exhibited no likeness to the heart of their illustrious father, they could not be his children in spirit and in truth. The blood of nature which ran through Abraham's veins, had no respect to the grace which was planted in Abraham's heart. "*He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*"[3] Here then, is a subject well worthy the earnest consideration of every professing Christian,—that is, of every one assuming to be a child of God. Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac, the

[1] John viii. 39, 44. [2] Heb. ii. 16. Rom. ix. 5.
[3] Rom. ii. 28, 29.

child of the promise,—the type of true believers in the Lamb of God,—the heir of his father's faith, as well as of his flocks, and herds, and lands. But unto the sons of the concubines which he had, he merely gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son. It is a solemn and startling truth, that men may take and taste the common and prudential bounties of God in large and liberal measure; even as He makes his rain to fall on the evil and on the good, and causes his sun to shine upon the just and upon the unjust; and yet they may be the while, without any of that happy inheritance of peace and life, which He has given, as the gracious birthright of those, who, being justified by faith, are made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Esau cried, "I have enough, my brother," when Jacob made an offering to him: and yet he had no birthright, no spiritual inheritance in Jacob's real blessing. O far from us, be the sad and soul-destroying error of imagining that we need no more, if only we have a full portion in this world's abundance! Far from us may it ever be, to rest in calmness and content, until, regarding God in Christ as our own, we can discern his favour as man's true happiness; and, while

many are saying, "*Who will shew us any good?*" may cry, "*Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us!*"[1]

The merely natural children of Abraham were under the Law,—the objects of its curse and condemnation, at the very moment when they were filled with a vain glorious pride, which made them put away salvation, as preached to them in the Lord Jesus Christ, and so to judge themselves unworthy of eternal life. The veil was upon their hearts, and they could not discern the truth of their state. As the close gauze of wire that encircles the flame in the safety lamp hinders it from enkindling the inflammable air without, so did the prejudices of the Jews hinder them from seeing their real state, and their only hope, and from having their hearts inflamed with love to Jesus. And their error should ring the knell of all legal hope, in every self-justiciary. Whereby was Abraham justified and saved?[2] For his excellent virtues and holy works? Because he forsook his kindred, country, and father's house? Because he was circumcised and observed the law? Because, at the divine command, he prepared to offer

[1] Psalm iv. 6. [2] Luther on Galatians.

up Isaac, the child of his prayers, his age, and God's own promise? No; but simply because he was a believer. Even so must we be saved, "*not by works of righteousness which we have done*," but by cleaving to the same cross, whereon Abraham suspended every hope of his salvation; and as simple believers on Him who justifieth the ungodly. No merely outward fellowship with a pure and apostolic Church, no ecclesiastical distinctions, no imaginary obedience to the law, whither deluded men would gladly flee to be independent of the righteousness of Christ, can give us one the least Gospel blessing, proposed by God, even to the chief of sinners in his Son. Reliance on these broken reeds proves us to be children of the bondwoman. And what is written in the imperishable record of the Holy Ghost? "*Cast out the bondwoman and her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.*"[1]

He who will be free from the law of sin and death must be a child of the *believing* Abraham, beloved and justified: or else he is only the child of the *begetting* Abraham, a man con-

[1] Gal. iv. 30.

ceived, born, and wrapped in sin, without faith, without pardon, without the Holy Ghost, and therefore in condemnation. And it was as reasonable in them who lived during the most benighted period of the Christian Church, to think, that notwithstanding all the transgressions in which they lived and died, they would assuredly be saved if they were buried in the cowl and cassock of a monk, as it would be in any of ourselves, to put our privileges and legal obedience in the stead of Christ, and yet hope for their sakes to avoid the sentence of his wrath, "*I never knew you depart from me.*"

But Abraham's seed,—they in whom he has the right of a spiritual paternity, and they in him the privileges of a blessed parentage as his spiritual offspring, are believers in Jesus Christ: and they are of no particular clime, country, sex, people, language; but, of all. These are they who shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.[1] The New Testament has taught us, that the promise of an innumerable progeny made to Abraham, though literally fulfilled, had a farther meaning;

[1] See also Isaiah xliii. 5—7.

and is to be understood of all who are partakers of like precious faith with him, whether Jews or Gentiles. "*Unto Abraham, and unto his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many, but, as of one; and to thy seed, which is Christ.*"[1] "Thus then the great and gracious paradisaical promise was republished and confirmed. The blessing in the latter edition, is, under a new form, essentially the same, of which assurance was given in the former; for that general blessing is the bruising of the serpent's head, or the destruction of the works of the devil,"[2] and the victorious salvation of God's Incarnate Son, whereby He hath opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

There is therefore an absolute, and happy identity between this gracious seed of Abraham, and the redeemed, justified, adopted, and holy family of heaven. The establishment of this fact forms the centre, towards which every ray of the apostle's triumphant and luminous argument had concourse and convergency. "*Ye are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus.*"[3] The adoption is the same to all the

[1] Gal. iii. 16.
[2] Biddulph's Theology of the early Patriarchs. ii. 114.
[3] Gal. iii. 26.

seed of Abraham, whether naturally derived from him, or spiritually engrafted into him. As all pious Jews obtained this happy relation under the Old Testament, so doth every disciple of our gracious Lord under the New. Were they justified freely? So are we, if justified at all. Was righteousness, even the imputed righteousness of Him who magnified the law, and made it honourable, the needful, the perfect, the spotless robe wherein they must be clothed for acceptance with God? Even so must it be our wedding garment. Was faith imputed to their great progenitor, and to them for righteousness? So must it be to us also. *They which be of faith, are blessed with faithful Abraham.*[1] He was justified, not by the *act*, but by the *object* of his faith, even "*God in Christ Jesus, reconciling the world to Himself.*"[2]

(2.) And here let me observe, that if the Holy Spirit hath graciously gifted us with the purged and purified vision of faith, He opens to our view the second part of his conclusion. "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, *and heirs according to the promise*, even of that most precious assurance, on which the believing

[1] Gal. iii. 9. [2] 2 Cor. v. 19.

patriarch leaned, when he stretched his sight far down the stream of ages, and saw the day of Christ, to his joy and rejoicing. "*In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*" [1] He saw what every spiritual child, graciously descended from himself, is privileged to behold; pardon, remission, reconciliation, adoption into the family of God, and all the immunities, and all the bestowments of unrestrained and infinite love, in their great treasure house, God in Christ. But who shall open all the blessings which this high relation embraces and includes? Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon the true seed of Abraham, that they should be called the sons of God, the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty! Who shall describe the mercies linked to this pre-adoption of the Father's love towards his children in the grace of faith? "*If children, then heirs: heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.*" [1]

O how insufficiently, how unworthily, how dishonourably to their Father's love, how injuriously to themselves, do the children of the Most High, the members of his Son's body, and

[1] Gen. xxviii. 14. [2] Rom. viii. 17.

the heirs of that glory, which the Son Himself in his human nature enjoys, overlook their privileges and possessions! How little are they accustomed to that large-heartedness of gracious feeling, whereby to comprehend "*the length, and breadth, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and to be filled with all the fulness of God!*"[1]

Therefore it is, that the children of God remain needy and unsupplied. Therefore it is, that they are weak and unfruitful. Therefore it is, that they halt and loiter, and that their souls cleave to the dust, when they should mount up on the wings of a lighter and more faithful vision of their mercies, as eagles; *when they should run and not be weary, when they should walk and not faint.*[2] Why do not these heirs of God take to themselves the blessedness of their heritage by anticipation, until they realize the whole in its enjoyment? They have the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as their possession. All covenant blessings are their own, made over to them in Baptism, and sealed anew in the Supper of the Lord. The blessing of

[1] Eph. iii. 18, 19. [2] Isaiah xl. 31.

ordinances; the blessings of the means of grace; the blessings of God's own word, with all its exceeding great and precious promises, belong to them: yet they see them not in all their loveliness, nor feel them in all their power. The Lord increase your faith. O that the "*God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.*"[1]

Surely if the heirs of salvation would be borne above the earth, to have their conversation in heaven, they should be more familiar with the treasure of their rich inheritance. Their faith would then be like the bow of Jonathan, and the sword of Saul, which never returned empty. Besetting sins would be trodden down, and iniquity would be as ashes under the soles of their feet. They would be made more than conquerors in all assaults of their spiritual enemies, and triumph in the midst of conflict.

[1] Ephes. i. 17.

"*Heirs according to the promise.*" The seal of every engagement to them being the blood of Christ; the seal of every engagement *in* them, being the witness of the Spirit; one of whose most endearing titles, to an experimental Christian, describes Him as "*the Holy Spirit of promise.*"[1] What an assurance of happiness doth this name contain and convey! What a pledge of life eternal! There is not a promise revealed in the book of God, of which the believer may not expect the performance at the hand of the Holy Ghost. He is the spirit *in* the promise, as its very life and essence. He is the spirit *of* the promise, being a party in the divine mind who gave it, and the person in the divine nature who accomplishes it to the heirs of promise, according to that "*everlasting covenant, which is ordered in all things and sure.*" *Heirs of God.* In other heritages, many a seemingly copious stream is comparatively dried up by dispersion into a great variety of channels; but here the number of co-heirs cannot diminish that blessedness of each, which is furnished by the inexhaustible sufficiency of Him who filleth all in all. The same light may be

[1] Serle's Horæ Solitariæ, II. 411. [2] Sam. xxiii. 5.

seen by millions, yet its fountain in the sun suffers no diminution. And when the all-sufficiency of God, the merit of his Son, and the omnipotence of the Holy Ghost, provide for the objects of their love, what blessings can be wanting to them within the limits of time, or the illimitable eternity that will succeed? The heir indeed is maintained by guardians during his nonage; but even the present possession comes from his own property. It is a portion of the revenue appertaining to him, according to the law of his inheritance. And thus it is with the heirs of God, and the joint heirs with Christ. They will never want a present portion, for "*God shall supply all their need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*"[1] And in what they have, they enjoy their own, those first-fruits which are the pledges, and earnests, and foretastes of the glorious harvest, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints. The whole inspired volume is more full of God's condescension to the lowest and meanest member of his church, than to the highest and proudest of those who do not belong to it; even as He

[1] Phil. iv. 19.

gave more minute directions concerning the very pins, and snuffers, and basins of the tabernacle, than concerning any matter of mere earthly magnificence.

A Christian should be enabled habitually to summon this witness of the Spirit with his spirit,—with his conscience purged by the blood of Christ, for testimony that he is indeed a child of God, by spiritual principles and feelings suitable to, and concurring with, his baptismal relation. The testimony should be practical. And when the Christian's experience sees the spirit of Jesus not only resting upon the Head, but descending to the lowest member of his mystical body, making rich even himself, as one of them; impressing holy principles and motions upon his soul; transforming him into a man wholly different from what he was in nature; giving that impulse from the Head, which makes the feet move in unison to its impulses and suggestions, and run with delight the way of God's commandments, then by the same Spirit he may know that he is united to Christ, a child of God, and if a child, then an heir—an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ. It surely befits the heir of an earthly heritage, to preserve his muniment room in

order; and every document in due place, that he may be able to lay his hand on each, as each is needed, if any enemy should challenge his right in the inheritance, and so that he may thus remain in peace. And the heirs of glory —are not they concerned to keep their evidences bright, beaming, clear, and ready to their hand? Are not they concerned to use all diligence to make their calling and election sure? So that if the accuser of the brethren should charge them with making an unrighteous claim to the mercies of God, for which he may deny their title, they may be enabled to rebuke him upon the authority of the word of God, and bid him get behind them.

Yet on the other hand, when these evidences may be blotted and almost illegible,—though the miscarriages of God's children may have made them so, they should not lightly question the love of God, and think that all is lost. The money may be in the sack's mouth, when yet the sons of Jacob do not see it. The Lord of the land may be their brother, though their eyes may be holden awhile, that they cannot see Him. He may be carrying on his designs of infinite love; although his mysterious dealing may give his brethren hard thoughts con-

cerning Him. Are any of you thus tempted? Remember your experiences, as comments upon the promises. Look up in faith to Him who restores the soul; and rest persuaded that He will yet restore unto you the manifestations of his love, and give you peace.

The heir of God, however, according to the promise of faithful Abraham, should never expect, never desire, never admit happiness to his heart, except in the path of holiness. Cheerful, filial obedience is the best outward mark and manifestation of the spiritual seed of Abraham. Live then, ye who thus believe, and trust yourselves to be the objects of adopting grace—live, not upon your privileges, but upon your Saviour. The life which ye now live in the flesh, let it appear to be carried on by the faith of the Son of God, who loved you and gave Himself for you. If you are indeed translated from the bondage of corruption, into the gracious liberty of the children of God, "*walk worthy of Him who hath called you to his kingdom and glory.*" If you are made priests unto God, see that ye remember your high consecration; and keep yourselves unspotted from

[1] 1 Thess. ii. 12.

the world, in holiness to the Lord. If you have been advanced to become kings, with all the co-heirs of Christ, then remember, that it is an essential privilege as well as a duty of that royalty to reign over your corruptions, and to subdue your iniquities, by the power of an indwelling Saviour. His glorious title of King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, is by no proof more clearly known in the church, than by the experienced exercise of his royalty, in casting down the power, as well as removing the guilt of sin. It must "*not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*"[1] Be careful, that your obedience, instead of being interrupted and partial, may resemble the sun's course through the zodiac. It misses no sign, it turns aside from no constellation; but traverses them all with undeviating steadiness and regularity. Watch against all omissions of duty, not less than against the commission of sin. It was the earnest prayer of that great luminary of the Anglican church, Archbishop Usher, when his brightness was just about to set, and leave only the radiant track of his example, 'Gracious Lord, pardon me for

[1] Rom. vi. 14.

thy dear Son's sake, all my sins, and especially my sins of omission.' That Christian greatly dishonours his Saviour, and his Father, and his Sanctifier, whose obedience is like the filial duty of Esau, when he was willing to fetch venison which Isaac might eat, hoping for a blessing and his birthright in that obedience; while yet he would not hearken to his father's voice, in a higher matter, but chose a wife for himself, in plain contrariety to his father's will. Be yours the Psalmist's prayer, and yours shall be the Psalmist's peace; "*O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.*"[1]

[1] Psalm cxix. 5.

SERMON III.

THE DIVINE CALLING OF ABRAM.

GENESIS XII. 1.

NOW THE LORD HAD SAID UNTO ABRAM, GET THEE OUT OF THY COUNTRY, AND FROM THY KINDRED, AND FROM THY FATHER'S HOUSE, UNTO A LAND THAT I WILL SHEW THEE.

IF a bridge were to be thrown across a wide and rapid river, the builder would probably see good, should it be practicable, to raise a pier in the mid-stream; so that the strain upon the extremities might be supported, and the sense of security and comfort increased. Such a measure (if I may so speak) would in its degree resemble the procedure of the Most High, in the developement of his eternal counsels for the salvation of sinners. A long period intervened between the fall of man, and the advent of his Redeemer. It seemed as though faith and hope would need some intermediate support—some-

thing visible to the church's eye, and firm beneath the church's footing, which might connect the first promise of salvation in Eden, with the amazing act, whereby it was effected upon Calvary. Very graciously and wisely was this want supplied. Abram, the friend of God, and, representatively the father of a spiritual posterity, appeared not far from the middle period between that wherein the first Adam ruined, and the second Adam redeemed the world. Thenceforward the way of life, cast up in the Lamb of God became more plain and cheerful to those who lived in faith upon his future manifestation and office. The saints passed along that gracious path in clearer views of Jehovah's love and purpose. They had not indeed received the promises, in the humiliation of the Son of God, by the assumption of our flesh; but having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them, and embraced them.

I proceed now, to enter more immediately upon the history of Abram (for such was his original name) as one upon which the Holy Spirit has stamped an impress of importance, greater than upon any other of the Old Testament saints. And may that God who was his shield, and his exceeding great reward, make us

partakers of like precious faith; that we may be blessed with faithful Abram.

We have already seen how unworthily the mind of God, in this instructive portion of his word, would be apprehended were it to be read as a mere historical record, from which we could only draw some moral or philosophical conclusions; such as might be supposed to arise from studying the history of any other illustrious individual, or the changes of states and empires. We should thus overlook the two great objects which a reader of God's revelation in the Bible ought ever to keep in view,—his supreme glory in Christ Jesus; and the manner in which all his procedures have been directed to subserve the good and glory of his Church. We have a personal, an immediate, an infinitely important interest in the life and providences of One, with whom God sealed the covenant of salvation. If then we are to derive instruction really useful from this portion of the Bible, it will be needful to regard Abram in a double point of view. We must endeavour to trace and follow out the leadings of a great principle, into the obligations and details of social life, by exhibiting the power and efficacy of faith. And we must regard the patriarch himself, as an

illustrious type of the Church collective, as its earthly federal head, to the end of all things; and the land of Canaan, whither he journied, as a dim, though very intelligible representation of the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

With this understanding, for which the whole tenour of Scripture is unquestionable and ample authority, I proceed to examine

THE COMMAND GIVEN TO ABRAM.

"*The Lord had said to him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.*"

Any due investigation of this solemn and authoritative precept must necessarily begin with

(I.) *A consideration of Abram's state and circumstances when he received it.* The deluge had overwhelmed the race of man; but it could not wash away the pollution and power of sin from those whom mercy had vouchsafed to spare, that they might repeople the world, and become the ancestry of the Church. Scarcely a century after the flood we find the impious attempt to build the tower of Babel frustrated by an express interposition from heaven. The

inhabitants of the plain of Shinar or Chaldea, laid the foundation of their work in pride and vanity; and it was levelled, as every thing so based must be, with the dust. The posterity of Shem, from whom was to be born the promised Saviour of the world, had sunk into a sad disposition to intermingle idolatry with their reverence towards the true God. They did not indeed worship gods of wood and stone, the work of men's hands; but the frequent appearances of the Word of Jehovah in a human form soon led to hero worship. This hero worship was from the first immediately associated with astronomical superstition, and an idolatrous reverence for the great lights of heaven.[1] Such a superstition was perhaps the first and most natural step which the evil heart of unbelief could take, when it departed from the uncreated and invisible God. But it was not on this account the less guilty. "Thou shalt have no other gods beside Me," is the especial command of the Most High; and fearfully does that man mistake, who deems himself to be no idolater but a worshipper of Jehovah, because his idol is not so hideous to the eye, so

[1] Faber on the Three Dispensations, I. 15, 246, &c.

revolting to the understanding, nor so debasing to the moral sense, as those which he sees others serving. If Newton himself had so fearfully abused the powers of his mighty mind, as to esteem his knowledge of the material world, and all its beautiful machinery to be the chief good—and had forgotten to give the glory where it was due, he would have been an idolater as flagrant as Nebuchadnezzar, when he said concerning the city of his pride, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty;" or as if he had joined the cry of those who shouted "Great is Diana of the Ephesians;" or as if he had exchanged places with the most miserable heathen who ever cast himself beneath the wheels of Juggernaut. We are equally under the curse and condemnation of an offended God, whether we depart from Him to follow the delusions of an infidel speculation and philosophy, like that which now wages in Christendom its fierce and unmitigable warfare against the Bible; or whether we are enslaved by those grosser works of the flesh—drunkenness, rioting, chambering, wantonness, Sabbath-breaking, profaneness, or any other of those iniquities, for the sake of

which cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. We are not indeed to suppose that the family of Abram was *wholly* given up to idolatry, for Jehovah is called the God of Nahor;[1] but they had very deeply imbibed the almost universal corruption of the times; according to the testimony of Joshua, "*Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood, in old time, even Terah the father of Abram, and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods.*"[2] True religion was indeed miraculously kept alive in the family of Shem, who lived until Isaac was fifty years old; but it was preserved, as a spark ready to be extinguished, or as life in one about to give up the ghost.

The confusion of languages at the dispersion of Babal, was the confusion of religion; and the darkness which fell upon the world, continued to cover and delude it, until the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, in the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost. The veil that was spread over all nations at Babel, was taken away at Mount Zion.[3] In the mean time, however, it was needful that a particular nation should be

[1] Gen. xxxi. 53. [2] Joshua xxiv. 2.
[3] Lightfoot's Works, 8vo. VIII. 376.

expressly separated from the idolatrous world, to become the depository of saving truth; to receive the types and prophecies, which testified of Christ, his coming, his sufferings, and the glory that should follow. This people were to prepare the way of his advent to the world; to preserve the oracles of God; to fulfil the divine intention concerning the Saviour's birth; and to be the point from whence the Sun of Righteousness might go forth to the rest of the world, "as a bridegroom cometh out of his chamber, and rejoice as a strong man to run a race." These great purposes could not have been well answered, if the people of God had been mixed for two thousand years among the heathen. The call of Abram, therefore, might be considered as a foundation for the church of Christ in a more distinct and regular state.[1] "*O the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and goodness of God how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*"[2]

The land of our nativity, in a spiritual point of view, is not the land of promise. Nature and grace are countries widely separated, and no man can be a citizen of both. The city of

[1] Edwards' History of Redemption. Works. V. 45.
[2] Rom. xi. 33.

sin has no community of people, laws, customs, king, privilege, or religion, with the city of salvation in Jesus Christ. Our original home is under the god of this world, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience, and the irreconcileable enemy of the God of heaven. Adoption into the inheritance of the saints in light, is utterly inconsistent with conformity to a world that lieth in wickedness. Abram, beyond Euphrates, was beyond the limits of the spiritual territory of God; for he was in the land of idolatry: and therefore, he must hear and obey the command, Get thee out of thy country, into another, and a very different country—the type of Immanuel's land, in grace and glory.

Many commentators have contended for a double call of Abram: one in Ur of the Chaldees, before the death of Terah; and another after that event took place; and apparently with good reason. Two several calls of God are made to Abram, one in Chaldea, the other in Haran. His first summons was a general command to leave the place of his birth, "Ur of the Chaldees." "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred;" but it makes no mention of his father's house; for that he took along with

him. The Holy Ghost, indeed, has ascribed the conduct of this journey to Terah, (Gen. xi. 31.) as if he had received the call, and had been the chief mover in this sacred migration. But that the call was made to Abram is clear and decisive. [1] He dwelt, therefore, in Haran, until the death of Terah, a period of fourteen years. But when afterwards God calls him from Haran, He bids him depart from *his father's house*, as well as he had done from his country and kindred before. He therefore now leaves his brother Nahor, and all his kindred, Lot excepted, behind him. [2]

Mesopotamia is often put for that part of Asia which is separated from Syria, by the river Euphrates; and, sometimes more strictly for the country between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, whence indeed it has its name. When St. Stephen therefore affirms, that God appeared unto Abram in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, he takes it in its largest sense, as comprehending Shinar or Chaldea. Abram's subsequent migration was into Syria, where Canaan was situated.

(II.) *The manner wherein this divine commu-*

[1] Joshua xxiv. 2. Acts vii. 2. [2] Leighton VIII. 110.

nication was made to Abram, is hidden in much obscurity. The Holy Ghost has not seen good to tell us whether it was given in a dream to the sleeper; in a waking vision of the night; by some secret impulses conveyed to his mind; or in a still higher and more mysterious manner. St. Stephen has described the transaction in terms which seem to point out the second Person in the Godhead, as the Messenger of his own will to the patriarch. *The God of glory* appeared unto, or was seen by, our father Abram. The WORD was often thus described to the early saints, with reference to His Incarnation. [1]

That such manifestations were afterwards made to this favoured servant of Jehovah, we cannot doubt. [2] And the consideration is most cheering; the gracious position in which it places lost and ruined man, most encouraging; the aspect of God's love, in thus going into the wilderness of an idolatrous land, to seek and to save one sheep that was lost, before He came in very deed to make his appointed sojourn upon earth, most endearing; and at the same time, entirely in character with all the stupend-

[1] Psalm xxiv. 7, 8. Isa. xl. 5. lx. 2. 1 Cor. ii. 8.
[2] Gen. xviii. 1, &c.

ous acts of Incarnate Love. It would therefore, have been unjust to the divine record, were I to have omitted the holy martyr's testimony, and with it my belief, that the words may be literally understood, for the comfort of those who feel in their spiritual unworthiness and destitution, a necessity of knowing that the Lord their Redeemer, hath no limits in the condescension of his saving tenderness.

(III.) Is it asked, *Whence originated this command of God to Abram?* We are at no loss for the answer. It was the spontaneous and unsought interference of divine goodness. It was neither of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God who sheweth mercy; and well did the heart of Abram understand it thus to be. As one, whose knowledge and worship of Jehovah were awfully debased by idolatry, he could have no possible claim to the favour of that jealous God, whom his superstition so greatly dishonoured, and surely none to a distinction in the household of salvation, so amazing, as to be called the father of the faithful, and the friend of God. He possessed not even the claim of birthright over his brethren—the usual ground of all outward religious distinctions. For although he is named first among

the sons of Terah,[1] yet is it rather with reference to his illustrious station and prerogative in the Redeemer's church, than according to his family standing and privilege. He was seventy-five years old, at the time of going forth from Haran. At this period Terah was dead, aged two hundred and five years; so that at Abram's birth, he must have already lived one hundred and thirty years; whereas he is said to have been seventy years old, when he begat, or began to beget his children, Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Abram, then, was in all probability the youngest of his father's sons. At all events he could not possibly have been the eldest.[2] The purposes of God were never intended to be exhibited and meted out, according to the order and measure of human expectances and calculations. Jesse offered his eldest son to Samuel, to be anointed king over Israel; and then all the rest of his children, according to priority of age, before he thought of presenting David, the youngest born. But when the stripling came from the field, the word of the Lord said to

[1] Gen. xi. 27.

[2] In the same manner it is stated, (Gen. v. 32.) that Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth; where Shem for dignity is named first, as Abraham here, and Japheth the eldest is named last, as Haran in this place.

Samuel, "Arise and anoint him, for this is he." Joseph fully expected his father Jacob to have laid his right hand, for the chief blessing, upon the head of his eldest born Manasseh. The patriarch, however, guided by that unerring Spirit, who then filled and enlightened his mind with prophetic truth, crossed his hands wittingly, to reverse the order wherein Joseph had placed his sons; and by that significant rite gave the birthright to Ephraim the younger. And doth not the tenor of Scripture assure us, that such procedures on the part of Jehovah, in the walk of Providence, are visible patterns of his dealing in the world of grace, even as the material tabernacle was the emblem of that above?

Abram, in this important turning point of his life, was the representative of the whole redeemed and sanctified church—a testimony also to God's undeserved love towards it, and to the absolutely gracious freeness of its salvation in Christ Jesus. Had Abram merit, whereof to present before God? Had he, out of the spontaneous movements of his own mind, endeavoured to gain the love and favour of Jehovah? Or, could there be any value in his subsequent obedience which could make him meet to receive grace, or, to deserve it of con-

gruity ?[1] Assuredly not. It is no pleasure to the Almighty that we are righteous; it is no gain to Him that we make our way perfect. God, of mere mercy stretches forth his hand, to bring the wanderer to Himself; vests the covenant of salvation representatively in him; builds up the church mystically upon him; and makes him, in the same manner, the earthly head of the people of God. And He, who is able of the very stones to raise up children unto Abram, deals with his seed, the heirs according to the promise, as He dealt with their great forefather. He bids them "*look unto the rock whence they were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence they were digged.*[2]" "*It is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy that He saves us,*"[3] if we are saved at all. Hath He truly raised us from the death of sin, to the life of righteousness; washed us in the blood of the Lamb; clothed us with the pure and spotless robe of an everlasting righteousness; made us temples for Himself, and formed us for his glory? And shall the mighty benefit be ascribed to any thing in ourselves;

[1] Art. XIII.

[2] See Ezekiel xvi. 1—14, as a model of divine procedure in the call and conversion of sinners.

[3] Titus iii. 5.

or shall the praise be given to the glory of his hand—that being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith He hath loved us, even when we were dead in our sins, He hath quickened us, together with Christ, even as He rescued Abram from the spiritual alienation of his dwelling in Chaldea?

(IV.) *The command and call given to Abram were effectual and saving.* The outward calls of God to sinners, whereby He enjoins them to repent and believe, to the saving of their souls, are many, and varied in their circumstances. He summons thoughtless, unbelieving, rebellious men, by the smiles of his daily bounty; by trying afflictions, the frequent monitors of his solicitude; by solemn or cheerful providences; by the still small voice of his goodness; by the earthquake, and the whirlwind, and the fire of his power; by the preaching, or reading of his word; by the conversation and examples of those who serve Him; and by other means and appliances of his grace. But the heart of man can resist them all. It can remain unconverted, though one rose from the dead, to give his experimental evidence of the joys or terrors of the invisible world. "If a man should rise, I say, from the dead, and truly relate unto the con-

science the woeful and everlasting horrors of hell; if a man's natural capacity were made as wide to apprehend the wrath, fury, and vengeance of a provoked God; the foulness, guilt, and venom of the soul, (fuller of sins than the heaven of stars,) as the most intelligent of the lost spirits conceive them; if an Archangel or Seraph should be sent from heaven, to reveal unto the soul of a natural man the infinite glory of God's presence, the full pleasures of his right hand, the admirable beauty of his ways, the intimate conformity and resemblance between his divine nature and Himself, and the image of his holiness in the creature, the unsearchable and unfathomable love of Christ, in his incarnation and sufferings, the endless incomprehensible virtue and preciousness of his blood and prayers; yet, so desperately evil is the heart of man, that, if after all this, God should not afford the blessed operation and concurrence of his own gracious Spirit, the revelation of his own arm and power upon the soul, to set on those instrumental causes, it would be invincible by any evidence, which all the cries and flames of the place of torment, which all the armies and hosts of heaven were able to produce. There is no might or power able to snatch a

man out of the hands of his sin, but only the Spirit of God.'[1]

The Spirit's Almightiness must attend his own call, if, instead of stopping just within the porches of the ear, to be driven thence by the first sound of earthliness and sin that enters there, that call shall become the power of God unto salvation. We prophecy unto the bones, and say, *O ye dry bones, hear ye the word of the Lord:*"[2] but they remain without motion, sense, or life, until the Spirit of God enters into them, and makes them live. He opens the heart to receive the word, like that of Lydia, when she attended to the things that were spoken of Paul. Then only will the cry of an earnest desire be uttered, "*Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.*"[3] Whence otherwise doth it happen, that one attendant upon the ordinances of religion shall be rapt up in them to heaven, as Elijah in the chariot of fire; while another remains like Elisha, below upon the earth? No power of moral persuasion enables the sinner to cast off the enmity of his carnal mind, and to glory in the service of God; but only that same act of Omnipotence, whereby Matthew was called from the receipt of custom; or Saul

[1] Bp. Reynolds, p. 343. [2] Ezek. xxxvii. 4. [3] 1 Sam. iii. 9.

from his errand of cruelty; or the Jews who persecuted the Lord of glory, from their unbelief; or Lazarus from the corruption of the grave; or the Lord Jesus Christ Himself from the tomb, before He saw that corruption. "The heirs of salvation" are called according to God's purpose, by the Spirit, working in due season: they through grace obey the call: they are made sons of God by adoption: they are made like the image of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.[1] This effectual calling, partaken in common with Abram, by every believer, is to him the mysterious centre of two eternities; and here two everlasting arms meet to embrace him, with a love which hath been felt towards him before all worlds; and which shall be communicated to him for infinite blessedness, when time and years shall be no more.

(V.) *The nature of God's command to Abram, was decided and peremptory.* "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee." The country, which had hitherto bounded all his desires, was to be forsaken. The charities

[1] Art. XVII.

of home, with all the endearment of natural affections; the very roof that had sheltered him, and ministered to his daily comforts; that had been the depository of his joys and trials; all these were to be left behind him. And this separation was to be made, at a time of life, when, even in that day of greater longevity, the adventurous propensities of our nature must have begun to act with diminished power; and the love of ease, was silently, but surely obtaining its triumph over the spirit of enterprise. If those over whom his affections yearned, would be the companions of his journey—well: if not, that journey must be made alone. The command was given in terms as absolute, as those which startled Lot from remaining beneath the impending fires of Sodom. "*Escape for thy life; look not behind thee.*"[1] They were the same which God invariably uses in the whole economy of his mercy for man's salvation. "*Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and I will be a Father unto you; and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*"[2] No

[1] Gen. xix. 17. [2] 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

common sacrifice was enjoined, when the master must leave his servants; the head of the family, his house; the herdsman, his flocks; the relation, his kindred; the patriot, his country; and above all, the idolater, the superstitions to which he was wedded;—when he must consider a continuance among them to be an impiety against the God of heaven, from which it was an expression of infinite mercy to deliver him. But, as on the one hand, wrath and judgment awaited him, if he remained; and on the other, a country typical of salvation, lay before him, he permitted not himself to doubt concerning the course which it was his wisdom to adopt.

Came this command then, alone to Abram? or doth not the Author and Finisher of faith within man's soul, declare the like in his word to every one who hears its good tidings of great joy? "*Hearken, O daughter, and consider; incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house: so shall the King have pleasure in thy beauty: for He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him.*"[1] In terms so strict—in calls of duty so uncompromising, does the Spirit speak unto the church; and bids her

[1] Psalm xlv. 10, 11.

arise, and meet, embrace, and supremely love her adorable Bridegroom. He *demands* our service, as well as He *deserves* it. By creation, by redemption, by covenant obligation in Baptism, we are bound to honour and obey Him. "*We are not our own, but are bought with a price; and should therefore glorify God, in our bodies, and in our spirits, which are God's.*"[1] Christ and the world, are elements that cannot mingle—opposites, between which there can be no reconciliation. His true disciples are not of the world, even as He was not of the world; and they may be broadly distinguished from those who are cleaving to its dust. No man can serve God and mammon. If therefore, the Saviour comes to invest a man with the blessings of his atonement; with the righteousness of God in Himself; with reconciliation, peace, holiness, all-sufficient grace, adoption into the family of heaven, hope that maketh not ashamed, and an inheritance, of which not even angels will be partakers; He hath surely good right to require a full and absolute separation from every thing, whereby the natural heart is lulled to rest in its idolatries,

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

and satisfied in its dreadful enmity against God. "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him: for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*"[1] Alas for the hope of that unsteadfast and temporizing professor, who will not quit his grasp of earth, that he may cling to his Saviour with all the affections of his soul! Such renunciation is the statute law of discipleship. "*He that loveth father or mother,*" *saith the Lord,* "*more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he that taketh not up his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.*"[2] If we would hear the Shepherd's voice indeed; if we would act as becomes his ransomed flock; and the sheep of his green pasture of salvation; He can speak no language which we should more readily understand, than that whereby He calls us from any sin, however besetting, and any indulgence that contradicts his will, however dear. "*Why halt ye between two opinions?*

[1] 1 John ii. 15, 16. [2] Matt. x. 37, 38.

If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow Him." "*If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee;* and *if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee.*"[2] A worldly man will cry, "*This is a hard saying, who can hear it?*" What makes it hard? What makes a professing Christian esteem that call to be severity, which is the yearning, pleading voice of unsearchable love? It is even the deafness of the heart, which prevents a professing Christian from hearing and understanding the privileges of the gospel, promised to those who turn from idols to serve the living and true God. It is the common mistake of using the sight of sense, instead of the sight of faith. And when this error is committed, every trifle of present worldliness, and every seducing transgression intercepts the beauty, happiness, and grandeur of salvation; just as a diminutive insect, passing over the eye-glass of a telescope, would intercept all the magnificence of the landscape that lay beyond the instrument. Hence too, it often happens, in those providential arrangements, whereby the glorified Head of the Church provides for the spiritual growth of its members, and for

[1] 1 Kings xviii. 21. [2] Matt. v. 29.

their gracious conformity to Himself, that when they will not forsake their idols, He removes such objects of their perverted love, that they may follow Him with less divided hearts.

The way to Canaan was long, difficult, and toilsome. Rivers were to be crossed, mountains climbed, and deserts traversed: yet Abram must journey onward, and rest not, as in his home, until he entered within the borders of the promised land. Even such is the nature of the Christian pilgrimage. Faith will be sternly tried; hope will be assailed severely; and alarm may come over the mind to depress it. The valley of humiliation must be low; it may often be dark and dreary; and the gracious traveller may stumble as he goes down into it.[1] The wilderness of temptation will have its scorpions and drought, its fiery serpents and its burning sands. But, if the feet of the spiritual way-faring man are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; the immutability of God, the unfailing efficacy of the mediation of Christ, and the absolute fidelity of the Holy Spirit of promise, are at once pledges that he shall hold right onward to the end, and of the glory that shall be imparted to

[1] Pilgrim's Progress.

him, at the revelation of his Lord and Saviour. Even the hills of trial, so painfully climbed, will be spiritual Pisgahs, the Nebos of his gracious experience, the mounts of inviolable promise, whence the land of life may be more distinctly seen, in the atmosphere of a higher faith, than he had upon lower ground; so that he will be encouraged to tread the remainder of the way in more settled peace, and greater assurance of hope.

1. *Hath the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit reached any who are in the decline of life, having long rested in the world, and been satisfied with it as their portion; without reflecting that it passeth away, and the fashion of it is soon to perish?* If so, they may possibly be discouraged, and almost disposed to dread, lest it should be too late; lest the grave should close upon them, before they can reach the better land, whither their Redeemer hath bidden them flee, by the way-marks of salvation in his gospel. O do not resign yourselves to the paralysing influence of unbelieving fears. He who commands the journey, and whose Spirit has at length spoken within your hearts, will give you support to perform it. "*His grace is sufficient for you; and his strength will be*

made perfect in your weakness."[1] "*He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.*"[2] Abram was seventy and five years old, when God called him at first from his idolatries; and he was led safely to Canaan, after many trials and afflictions by the way. If you are called into the vineyard of your Saviour's love and cause, even at the eleventh hour, his boundless tenderness and mercy will unite you with those labourers, whose high privilege it is to bear the burden and heat of the day. You shall not taste of *natural* death (of *spiritual death* you shall *never* taste) until you can each say with aged Simeon, "*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*"[3]

2. *Are any, still young in years, called in true conversion, by the love of the Eternal Trinity, to leave the land of their idolatries; to join the family of God, and to be followers of those*

[1] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [2] Isaiah xl. 29—31. [3] Luke ii. 29.

who through faith and patience have inherited the promises? Theirs is a happy state, and theirs a glorious prospect. He who hath thus, not only invited, but quickened them by the power of his converting Spirit to a new and heavenly life, hath given in his testimony to the good part which they have chosen: "*I love them that love me: and they that seek me early shall find me.*"[1] Lot, although much younger than Abram, was made partaker of his journey; and would have enjoyed more of its privileges, if he had trodden more simply in the way of his uncle's faith. Forsake your idols, and embrace your Saviour. Go with the Mnasons of the church, and be followers of them, as they also are of Christ. When you meet, (and especially when you meet among your own kindred,) one, who, like Naomi, is leaving the land of Moab, to dwell in the true Bethlehem of the promised land, take your station by the devoted believer's side, and say, "*Whither thou goest, I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.*"[2] So shall your way be holiness; your companions, the God of peace, and the peace of God, and your end the vision of his glory in the rest and joy of his accomplished kingdom.

[1] Prov. viii. 17. [2] Ruth i. 16.

SERMON IV.

THE COMMANDMENT WITH PROMISE.

GENESIS XII. 2, 3.

AND I WILL MAKE OF THEE A GREAT NATION, AND I WILL BLESS THEE, AND MAKE THY NAME GREAT, AND THOU SHALT BE A BLESSING: AND I WILL BLESS THEM THAT BLESS THEE, AND CURSE HIM THAT CURSETH THEE; AND IN THEE SHALL ALL FAMILIES OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED.

A DIVINE injunction, however briefly made, and however distinct from all other considerations, implies, in the very nature of things, the fitness of an entire obedience. When that emphatic preface, "Thus saith the Lord" introduces any message of the will of God, it involves the creature in obligations which it would be most guilty rebellion to oppose. The sovereignty of Jehovah supposes the absolute subjection of man to its exercise. His Omnipotence can enforce submission. His Wisdom claims to be implicitly trusted. His Beneficence offers an ample pledge that his purposes

are kind: and his holiness gives assurance, that they have unmingled good for their end and object.

When that command therefore was made by the Most High to Abram, "*Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy Father's house, unto a land that I will show thee,*" its fulfilment would have been imperatively bound upon him, although no reason should have been given, and if no promise had been annexed. But the condescension of God induced Him to accompany the exercise of sovereign prerogative with such assurances, as, once received into the heart, were powerfully calculated to subdue all opposition, and make obedience, not only prompt, but delightful on the part of Abram. The box of spikenard is partially opened, and the patriarch's soul apprehends so much of its sweetness, as to be refreshed and strengthened for all the sacrifices and self-denials, that lay before him on his journey. And that believer, who carefully links the precept with the promise, as the prophet joined the staves in one, will find a rod thus made for his hand, on which he may safely and happily lean, to "run with patience the race that is set before him."

The command of God, that Abram should forsake his country, his kindred, and his idolatries, to seek a land at once distant and unknown, was the subject of my last discourse. I have now to consider—

THE PROMISES, WHEREBY THE COMMAND WAS ACCOMPANIED.

The whole scheme of Redemption, with all the glory of the Godhead by whom it was to be accomplished, and all the amazing circumstances of its process and completion, was enwrapped in a single promise, which has been unfolding gradually for nearly six thousand years; and is yet to be evolved; until it is finally exhibited in the glory of the Mediator, and the salvation of his Church. Every promise of Scripture, is in fact an intermediate and visible link, connecting to a believer's eye those purposes of the divine mind (otherwise hopelessly dark and unintelligible,) with the intention and method of their fulfilment. They are registered in the word of God, for the assurance of faith, and the comfort of those who receive them in singleness and sincerity of heart. All these exceeding great and precious promises are branches of the tree of life, springing forth from the person and mediation of Jesus Christ as their

stem and root. Very many, very beautiful, and very refreshing are their fruits: and those Christian travellers, who would enjoy their sweetness, must pluck them with the hand of faith, and live upon them in the heavenward journey, as Sampson went forwards, eating the honey from the lion's carcase. Thus, and thus only, can they go on their way rejoicing.

Since however, the promises of Scripture, excellent as they are, and transcendantly manifesting divine graciousness, "are only the golden vessel, while God in Christ is the manna contained within," it is needful to consider:

I. THE AUTHOR OF THE PROMISES, AS REVEALED TO THE MIND OF ABRAM.

The Lord, even Jehovah, the Almighty and self-existent God, the Giver of life and happiness, who revealed Himself to the mind of the Patriarch, and brought him into the light and blessedness of covenant engagement and love towards Him, was the source and centre of them all. And no promises will do their full work of goodness on the heart, by making Christians partakers of the divine nature, until, looking through them, God in Christ Jesus reconciling the world to Himself, is realized and appropriated as their well-spring. Faith must

take the warrant of a promise, if it may seek God with hope: but faith can be assured of no saving interest in that promise, except as the believer is persuaded that he hath union with Christ, who, in his mystical person, is the true and proper Object of faith.

And what shall a Christian see, if, like Stephen, he look steadfastly up into heaven, where those promises are deposited with Him who liveth, and was dead, and is alive again for evermore; and waits at the right hand of the throne of God to dispense them, as Joseph opened the granaries of Egypt, to supply the wants of his brethren? He will discover *the infinite grace and goodness* of God, whereby every engagement of his love for the salvation of men hath been so freely made, and every blessing is with his Son, offered in absolute mercy, even to the chief of sinners. Those engagements once undertaken, their fulfilment becomes justice; according to the terms of that covenant wherein the Word undertook with the Father for the whole work of Redemption, and for opening all the stores and fulness of God in Himself. But if we carry our thoughts upwards, and endeavour to look into the origin of these mercies, we can neither find, nor imagine

any other, than the spontaneous goodness of God. And, if after such an enquiry, we draw nearer home, and reflect upon our unworthiness; being experimentally taught that the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint,—that the inherent and actual sin of man, defiles him with pollution which the holy nature of God abhors, we are again assured that his dealing with us, and every promise of love included in it, must have originated in his unspeakable compassion. Such a view is, moreover, not merely the necessary, but the only consolatory one we can take of the subject. The obligations, whereby God hath thus bound Himself, involve the glory of his own Attributes, as well as the honour of his Son; and therefore will be made good. "*He that spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?*" [1]

The promises are a glass, wherein *the unchangeable faithfulness of God* may be discovered. These, with "*every other good and perfect gift of free bounty, are from above, and come down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*" [2] The engagements and promises

[1] Rom. viii. 32. [2] James i. 17.

made by Christians converted to His grace, delighting themselves in the multitude of peace, through the atonement, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, are notwithstanding, through the power of indwelling iniquity, often broken, almost as soon as they are uttered. They resemble Jonah's gourd, which came up in a night, and withered in a night; or characters written in sand, which the first tide of temptation effaces. But the promises of God are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus, to his praise and glory, not one having failed, not one to fail for ever; unless indeed the Saviour's purchase could lose its merit, or God fail to remember his engagements, made with the Church, in his Son.

Goodness may suffice to make a promise; *but power is necessary to its fulfilment.* And in this consideration the believer will faint, if he withdraw his eye, even for a moment, from the Omnipotence of God, to accomplish every thing which He hath undertaken for his servants and children, in the person and grace of their Redeemer. All power indeed, both in heaven and earth is given unto the Son; and the fulness of God dwells with Him, to complete every engagement, to the letter. And it is a happy

pillow for the repose of faith, that He is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we can ask or think. All must be well if we learn to trust Him, to lean upon Him, and to suspend the weight of our salvation upon the Almightiness of his nature, and the perfection of his mediatorial work.

Nor is *unerring wisdom* the least, although it must be the last attribute to which I can allude, in directing you to God in Christ Jesus, as the great Object of faith in the promises. Men are continually learning, continually enlarging the boundaries of their knowledge; and continually taking credit for the extent of their attainments. Yet we need only throw a very cursory glance around, to see how little all these boasted stores of human intellect can advance the purposes, for which they are collected, and secure their professed object, the happiness of man. The wisdom of God, on the other hand, has received no addition to its greatness from all eternity by exercise; (just as the shining of the sun has added nothing to its light, since the creation of the world:) but it is, and ever will remain, infinitely sufficient to devise, with infallible certainty, the means of accomplishing all the purposes of his will, and all the as-

surances of His grace. The heirs of promise cannot indeed discover the methods whereby it operates; for God's counsels are a great deep: but they should rest contented, in knowing that although clouds and darkness may be about his throne, yet righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his seat. When St. Paul exclaimed, "*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and goodness of God: how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*"[1] he was not the less disposed to rest his soul upon them, or rather upon the Saviour, who made them manifest to his faith, than if they had lain upon the surface of God's every day procedure towards himself, and the Church; and were as intelligible to him as the intentions of his own mind.

We have indeed no warrant to suppose that a view of God so clear and far-discerning, as to comprehend the fulness of these truths, was yet vouchsafed to Abram. The communication however, must have been made with sufficient plainness, to shew him God as his Friend and Helper; and to bestow upon him such apprehensions of divine goodness and love, as should

[1] Rom. xi. 33.

secure obedience, amidst all the trials whereby it might be attended. Those communications were enlarged by subsequent fellowship. His eye was thus strengthened to look with more understanding, at each new communication of grace, into those depths of goodness, faithfulness, power, and love, which are opened to the believer in Christ Jesus. "We shall know, if we follow on to know the Lord." If any man will do his will, he shall learn it more fully: and "*beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, shall be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*"[1] Our imperfect acquaintance with God in his gospel, is no ground of discouragement, if we are faithful to the light vouchsafed us. If He hath called us by the effectual power of his grace, and made us willing to obey; our path of knowledge, peace, holiness, and joy, will resemble the shining light, which shineth more and more, unto the perfect day. If God hath so far revealed Himself to us, as our portion for eternal Salvation by Jesus Christ, that his love is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost given to us, it will

[1] 2 Cor. iii. 18.

enkindle our own; and as our love is enlarged, our light will be increased.

(II.) We have now to consider, THE NATURE OF THESE PROMISES.

The engagements of God are vouchsafed to men under the Gospel, in order to answer the same end, as deeds and evidences among men in their dealings with each other. When the soul is made fast to God, by the anchor of its peace, sure and steadfast, which entereth into that within the vail, the promises of the gospel, float like the buoy upon the surface of the waters, to direct the Christian, as in a moment, to the anchorage in which he hopes and trusts. They form a beaming constellation in those worlds of light, where his heart should continually dwell. It was even so with those promises vouchsafed to the eye of Abram's faith; guiding him onwards in hope and patience from Mesopotamia to Canaan. He was a Chaldee, and therefore probably an astronomer: but the material heaven with which he was familiar, could exhibit no object of contemplation so cheering, no pilot of his way so certain and infallible, as the guidance of God's sure promises, shining in the brightness of present hope within his heart, and soon to beam upon him in

the yet greater radiance of God's covenant love, secured and consummated to him for evermore.

If however we desire better to see and understand something of the beauty of this spiritual constellation, we must look upon it more narrowly, and examine for a few minutes the individual stars of which it is composed. They appear indeed at the first to be mainly temporal, and had a certain measure of accomplishment in their letter,—but they had a spiritual reference which Abram understood: because his faith looked beyond the surface, and saw redeeming blessings richly treasured up behind them. And here is the blessedness of such as are one with faithful Abram, in Christ Jesus. They understand and realize providential promises; but they rest not there; for that rest would be polluted with all the alloy of earthliness, in the elements of change and termination. They regard them therefore as refreshments by the way, in order that they may more comfortably attain the end.

(1.) The first promise exhibits a remarkable instance of the tenderness, wherewith God suits his communications to the wants and circumstances of his creatures. Abram was childless; and the Lord said, "*I will make of thee a*

great nation." Yet here was an engagement exceedingly contrary to the suggestions of earthly sense and reason. His heart could have been hardly warmed by it, before its improbability must have struck him, if he listened only to flesh and blood. He was childless; how then should he be the father of a great nation? And how was his political advancement to be expected, if he left that land where he might have influence and power, to go as an exile and a stranger into another? The promise was, notwithstanding, exactly fulfilled, in the posterity of Hagar.[1] It was made good, according to the more particular purpose of the Most High, when Balak complained that the sons of Jacob covered the face of the earth;[2] and in the prosperity of the Jewish people within the land of Canaan.[3] But it has its highest and most especial accomplishment, in that spiritual posterity which forms one redeemed, sanctified Church, gathered out of all nations, and kindreds, and tongues, and people, under the dominion of the Lamb of God; proving Abram, as the father of all them that believe, to be truly the head of a great and

[1] Gen. xvi. 10. xvii. 20. [2] Numb. xxii. 11.
[3] Luther in Genesin xii.

illustrious nation. He had indeed great need of patience, to await the acting out of these engagements, on the part of God. Edom, the posterity of Esau, had grown up into a kingdom, before the sons of Jacob had where to set their foot in Canaan. The motion of this promise resembled that of a slow-paced planet, hardly visible to the naked eye: but when the time of the promise drew near, which God had sworn to Abram, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt.[1] Even so, must the believer await the fitting time of the Father's wisdom, which He hath kept in his own power, acting upon the persuasion, that in due season, the harvest of faith shall come, and the ingathering be great.

(2.) But, as if the high distinction already promised, and those yet to follow, needed something which might knit them together, and supply every joint of the whole system; God declares in the second member of the promise, *I will bless thee.* No doubt this glad communication embraced all the support, which Abram needed on his journey, all the provisions, whereby he must be fed, all the protection

[1] Acts vii. 17. Spurstowe on the Promises, p. 87.

which the Most High would spread around him, as a shield; and all the other manifestations of providential goodness, personal and relative towards him. But to confine it within these limits, would be to look upon the word of God with less insight into its meaning, than Abram had, even in this early twilight of his spiritual day. He had, personally, no share in the land of Canaan. The blessing therefore, must necessarily have extended itself to spiritual and eternal mercies, whereof Abram's understanding would be enlarged, as new communications were made to him; to show that the promise could only be fulfilled in pardon, adoption, sanctification, perseverance in the faith, and a crown of life. No man was ever yet brought to forsake the idols among which his soul dwelt, by any promises of merely present good, which painful experience would often appear to contradict. A spiritual meaning must be the key that opens all the wards of the mind of God, and shows the mercies treasured up in it for his children. Then, and then only, as such gracious purport is apprehended, will they be prepared to follow; as He may point the way; and turn from idols to serve the true and living God, in the gospel of his Son.

(3.) Again, it was declared to Abram, *I will make thy name great.* Amply has that promise been fulfilled, both in Ishmael and Isaac. The friend of God, had indeed some little renown as a conqueror; but none as a lawgiver, or inventor of useful arts. He was no philosopher, but a plain man dwelling in tents; yet no name, no memory is more renowned than his, throughout Christendom, and even among those who serve the false prophet in the eastern world.[1] This however, is not the highest ground, on which the greatness of Abram's name must stand. His record is not chiefly that of worldly honour, and ecclesiastical privilege. It is especially written in the spiritual history of the Church, whereof he is the high father, and in the blessings of those who glory in him, as the head and representative of the heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. All distinctions, except those arising from adoption into the family of God, are written in the dust, and the grave will cover them. And He, who gives every privilege according to his own grace, and the Father's love in Him, has taught us how to make the estimate—"*In this rejoice not, that the devils are*

[1] Foster's Mahometanism Unveiled.

made subject unto you; but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven."[1]

(4.) Another promise follows,—disjointed indeed from one of its predecessors in the divine communication made to Abram, but inseparably united with it, in the mind of God. "*I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing.*" How far the promise was accomplished, we can only dimly trace, in the persuasion, that thousands have profited by the faith, devotedness, and holy walk of this man of God, through the whole round of his duties, and to the end of his life, as their high example. His instruction has given light: his conduct has embodied the precepts of God to many; while it was the peculiar grace and loftiness of his distinction, to be the world's emphatic blessing, as the forefather of its Saviour.

Is this delightful promise then confined to Abram—or doth it not extend to all that holy family, whereof he is the earthly head? Every Christian hath an interest in it, as a distinguished portion of his spiritual birthright. Abram lives not for himself. He is set up as a witness for God, and as an instrument for good

[1] Luke ix. 20.

to the Church and to the world. Every spiritual mercy therefore, whereby he is enriched; every communication of his Father's bounty in the everlasting covenant; every grace of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon him, unto sanctification; every sure promise made over to him, hath a reference beyond himself. When God eminently blesses any of his servants, he gives not to them alone, but that they may become the providential channels of carrying forth those blessings to others. These holy influences descending upon any eminent saint and servant of the Most High, pass onwards to others for their good; "*like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down npon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garments.*"[1] Its holy influence is as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descendeth upon the mountains of Zion, not to rest upon the hill top near to heaven, but to pass downwards and be poured upon the little vallies beneath it. And what a world would this become—how beautiful would it be in holiness, how rich in the fruits of righteousness, how sweetly harmonious in every note of

[1] Psalm cxxxiii. 2.

its compass, to sound the glories of redemption, were every believer anxious that from the opened windows of heaven, spiritual blessings should be poured upon him, till there was not room to receive them; not merely for his individual prosperity, peace, holiness, and joy; but that God in all things might be magnified by Jesus Christ, in the extension of his kingdom over the hearts of others. A Sovereign blessed of God, would be a blessing to his subjects. They who bear rule under him, would spread the honour of the Most High in the administration of their office. The ministers of the sanctuary,—their hearts filled with the love, and their lips touched with the spirit of God,—men of prayer, wrestling for their Lord's presence and unction on their labours, would make many sympathize with them, and largely promote the honour of their Lord. Parents, enriched by the unspeakably precious blessing of an indwelling Saviour, would have their pleadings largely answered for their children; and their households would be families of heaven. Masters would have their domestics obeying them in the duties of every day, "*not with eye service as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from*

the heart."[1] The green spots in the wilderness, thus watered by many streams from the river of life, would multiply and approach each other, until they covered it with one bright livery of holiness and love; making it blossom like Eden the garden of God.

Oh, what joyous encouragement is here to any and every faithful disciple of the Redeemer! "I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing." Hath unchangeable truth fulfilled the former part of the promise to any of you? Then who shall separate it from the latter? If God hath commissioned it to be fruitful, beyond the immediate object of its bestowment, who shall make it barren? Look still upwards for all covenanted blessings from Him, with whom they dwell. Look around for the means of instrumentally distributing them, by influence, example, instruction, prayer; and you who thus long to magnify the Lord, will assuredly know, either here, or in the disclosures of a coming day, that you have not walked your heaven-ward way alone. You will not come unattended to the resurrection of the saints, *when they that be wise shall shine as the bright-*

[1] Eph. vi. 1.

ness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.[1]

(5) And, as if these distinctions did not suffice for the man whom God delighted to honour, we find Jehovah making as it were a league offensive and defensive with Abram his friend. *I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee.* This is language never used, but of one especially favoured by the Most High. It declares, not only that he should be blessed himself, but that all others should be blessed or cursed, as they respected or injured him. Of this amazing condescension towards him, the histories of Abimelech, Laban, Potiphar, both the Pharaohs, and especially Balak and Balaam, furnish remarkable examples:[2] "*I wot,*" said the idolatrous enemy of the sons of Abram, "*that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.*" "*How shall I curse*" (said the wretched seer, when his heart vainly longed to call down defeat and ruin upon Israel) "*how shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied?*"[3]

(6.) I pass however to the climax of the

[1] Dan. xii. 3.

[2] Fuller on Genesis Vol. i. p. 152.

[3] Numb. xxiii. 8.

whole gracious declaration of Jehovah to his servant: because a spiritual meaning of the last promise is involved in it. "*In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*" In these few words, the germ of the covenant of salvation is brought before the eye of the Church, as it was exhibited to the apprehension of its earthly representative: and he must have reasoned on this wise, concerning the amazing communication thus vouchsafed to him. "If all families of the earth are to be blessed in me, the mercy cannot have its existence vested in myself personally, for I shall not live to behold it. This mysterious good and benediction, must arise therefore from one who shall be born of me; who, himself eminently distinguished of God, shall bring with him a blessedness, of which the length and breadth shall embrace the whole earth. He must therefore, be not man merely, but God also; though be must assume human nature, in order to be born as my descendant." Thus, did a divine communication, involve in a few simple words, that mystery of an incarnate Saviour, which holy patriarchs and prophets more largely and clearly explained, for the faith and hope of his waiting Church.[1]

[1] Luther in Genesin, Cap. xii.

The world, liberated from the yoke of Satan, death and hell destroyed, the law fulfilled, and its curse removed, sin forgiven, eternal salvation provided, and the kingdom of heaven opened unto all believers, were among the mercies comprised in this promise. They broke upon Abram's mind, as the dawnings of that day of Christ, which he saw perhaps even now dimly in spirit, though not in flesh, and whereof he was glad, as a believer, though yet an infant in the life of faith. All the posterities of Adam were cursed in him; and God here promises that they should be blessed in the seed of Abram, and by him, in the seed of the woman.

Now this blessing must extend to, and embrace all the good whereof men are deprived by the curse, or it cannot establish its claim and assumption. Its declaration was delayed from the promise in Eden, to that in Ur; because the Most High intended to leave mankind to walk, for a long and dark period in their own way; that thus He might exhibit his severity against sin; that thus He might display the sovereignty and freeness of that mercy, through which He had provided and promised a Deliverer; and that thus He might make

trial of the wisdom of man, in seeking out for the person of the Redeemer, and the nature of the freedom which He would confer. In this most precious promise therefore, was that gold deposited, in the keeping of the Church, which after many generations was brought forth, and stamped with the image of God.

The curse pronounced upon Satan in paradise is here renewed. "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse *him* that curseth thee." The blessing is to many, the curse refers to one, the apostate angel and god of this world, who brought sin and shame and ruin upon it.[1] This gracious promise was again and again renewed: for Infinite Love and Wisdom knew it to be the foundation, on which faith must rest through many ages, to elapse before the advent of Christ. Thus was the gospel preached to Abram; "*that the blessing of Abram might come upon the Gentiles, through Jesus Christ: that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*" Through this declaration does every believer trace up, as it were, the ancestry and lineage of his spiritual mercies, in the Lamb of God; because it connects the

[1] Owen on the Hebrews, Vol. I. p. 175.

person, nature, and offices of the Incarnate Word, with the first hope and ray of salvation, that burst through the darkness of man's fallen soul in Eden, and took away that load of sin, which, if it had remained upon him, would have eternally overwhelmed and destroyed him. Sweetly then, as every message of a Saviour's love should strike upon our ears, a peculiar delight should be felt, by those who have experienced the power of redeeming love, in this promise to Abram, which not only gives an assurance of pardon and peace to the world, but vests it in an individual and his posterity, for safe keeping, until the coming of Him of whom the patriarch was a type and shadow. "*Unto you first, God having raised up his Son Jesus, hath sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.*"[1] A Bible, a Gospel, and a Saviour, are the blessings thus given to Abram, and left by him as a rich legacy to the church and the world.

1. Are such promises as these precious when apprehended by the heart of a believer? *Then should they be diligently pleaded before God in prayer.* If we would enjoy them in their

[1] Acts iii. 26.

excellence, and find them making us conformed to his image, who is the sum and substance of them all, we must seek to have them fastened upon our hearts by the work of the Holy Spirit. Our thoughts indeed are so little proportioned to the majesty and goodness of God, that when we would ask for needed blessings we are often discouraged in prayer; like Moses, when Jehovah had promised quails for all the multitude of Israel: as though it were impossible that God should do as He had said. And therefere, because we fear to ask, we fail to obtain. When meditation upon the promises has filled a Christian's heart with a full sense of the value of evangelical blessings, in the glorified treasure-house of the church, prayer should pour out the desire to possess them; and God will be found with an open hand to bestow them. The promises, so pleaded and sought from God, will be blessed in their own high value, and blessed to the receiver as answers, to prayer, and evidences of the love of Christ.

II. *A Christian should never rest contented in a slight acquaintance with the promises.* They are intended, in the purposes of divine wisdom, to smooth the path of self-denial—to console the child of God in the afflictions and

trials of nature and grace—to enable the good soldier of Jesus Christ to endure hardness in his gracious warfare—to lift his renewed mind above the love of this present world—to bear it up over the floods of temptation—to produce conformity with Christ, in his death to sin, and in his reign over sin—and to enable him to perfect holiness in the fear of God. And shall it then be, that one who feels his need of fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, for these important ends, and for that peace of God which passeth all understanding, should be satisfied, without ample and constant experience of their presence and power within his heart? God forbid! O never may it suffice those who have embraced these promises in their Redeemer, only to dip the end of the rod of faith in this honey, and put it to their mouth, and so pass on, and be little strengthened. He who would sound the depths of the sea, must not stand upon the shore, and let down his plummet. He must sail far upon its bosom, and then try whether its bottom may be reached at all. It is thus with the promises. He who would understand the love and greatness of his Saviour and covenant Father in them, must follow them out, in the life of an experimental religion. He must

familiarize himself with them, as they meet his view; and endeavour, through a daily increasing acquaintance with them, to "*know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and to be filled with all the fulness of God.*" [1]

III. Is it the end of all the exceeding great and precious promises given to Abram, and his seed by faith, that they should be made partakers of the divine nature? Then is it an all-important question for a believer to ask, *Whether he is so enjoying the happiness they communicate, and using them according to the purpose of the Spirit, as to be escaping the corruptions that are in the world through lust, and purifying himself, even as God is pure?* "Having these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." [2] He who neglects this solemn call, can never abound in the riches, either of grace or consolation. The promises, truly received into the heart, and faithfully dealt by, are not only *causes* of holiness, as workmen of the Spirit, but *arguments* to enforce it: and ill indeed shall we understand, either their nature, or their

[1] Ephes. iii. 9. [2] 2 Cor. vii. 1.

value, if we fail to exemplify the life of faith upon them. They are pure in themselves, even as gold purified seven times in the fire; and where they are truly received, and enjoyed, according to the will of God, must effect, (notwithstanding all the opposing power of sin and Satan) a gracious conformity to themselves, and to the fountain of immaculate holiness, from whence they flow, to supply the church. They not only declare, but communicate the riches of the grace of God to his children in Christ Jesus; and they prepare his blessed family, day by day, for the enjoyment of his rest, and the vision of his glory.

SERMON V.

THE COMMAND OBEYED.

GENESIS XII. 4, 5.

So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. and Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran: and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

He who should stand at the source of one of those mighty rivers in the new world, which traverses a thousand leagues of country, and then pours a sea of water into the ocean, would never imagine, unless he had traced it upwards, that it could be the parent of such a stream. And it is even so in the processes of divine wisdom in the spiritual world. The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, to the eye of sense. Some of those events connected with

the great economy of redemption, which have been most astonishing in their progress, and which are hastening onwards, to a completion unspeakably and everlastingly glorious, have had their rise in great obscurity, and passed almost unnoticed through their earliest developement. "Indeed, the brevity of the Mosaic record down to the call of Abram, has often excited surprize. Doubtless, events of great variety and interest, occurred in the collisions, corruptions, and restorations of the earlier world. But the reason of this brevity, may have been the preservation of the *outline;* which alone was important to identify the plan of Providence, throughout the ages to come. If all the *details* had been given, that outline might have been difficult to trace. But now, we have the map, with the great features marked upon it, to the exclusion of all the minor prominences. We have the form, undisguised by the various changes and involutions of the robe. Yet this but the more distinctly vindicates the *inspiration* of the Pentateuch. What *human* dexterity could thus anticipate the fates, and thus administer to the wisdom of the future?"[1]

[1] Dr. Croly's Three Cycles of Revelation, pp. 305, 306.

When Noah, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house, the mockers, and loiterers around him, little dreamed of that destroying flood, which was soon to be poured upon them; nor of the fortunes of that future Church and world, whereby the coming ruin would be succeeded. When the command and promise of the Most High came unto Abram, it was probably unknown beyond the little circle of his own family. And when he girded up his loins, and took his staff in his hand, to obey it, by removing from Ur, the Chaldeans would no doubt witness his departure with few emotions, save those of wonder at his folly. Yet was this event, the first visible link in that amazing chain of providences, whereby God was about to bind together all the fortunes of his Church in one beautiful harmony—whereby that Church, separated from the world, as God's peculiar people, was to be plainly united to Himself, for its own good, and his supreme glory in its salvation. When Abram went forth from his country, a childless wanderer, it never entered the mind of any of his neighbours, that he would become a great nation; less still, if possible, that in his seed should all families of the earth be blessed; that through him the church

should have light and life eternal, when the Son of God should become in his posterity the Son of man. We stand now at the source and fountain of the patriarch's history. We have our hand upon the connecting link between the Patriarchal and Levitical Dispensations. We have hitherto, merely looked upon the surface of those depths of unsearchable grace and goodness, which Abram's calling of God contains. It will be our first step down the stream of those wonders which make known by the church, the manifold wisdom of God in Abram's history, to consider—

THE OBEDIENCE PAID BY HIM TO THE DIVINE COMMAND.

If his mind could have been influenced by those ordinary considerations, which sense and sight would suggest to one so circumstanced, all would have pleaded against the divine command; all would have united to say, "This be far from thee: this shall not happen unto thee." But when the power of Jehovah attended his own revelation, every hindrance was subdued.

(I.) THIS OBEDIENCE is exhibited, as PROMPT, UNHESITATING, AND IMMEDIATE. The friends among whom Abram had long

dwelt; the Society, with which his heart and affections were conversant; the temporal good, that had grown up around him; the pursuits of his life; the habits of his mind; and, as I have already said, the idols of his worship, were all to be abandoned. The way before him, was dark and unpromising. Nay, it does not appear that his Heavenly Master had given him any distinct view of Canaan itself, the place where he was to dwell, until he had actually reached it. It was just simply said, "Go into a land which I will shew thee:" and only when he arrived in the plain of Moreh did God condescend to say—"Unto thy seed (not to thyself, but to thy seed) will I give this land."[1] The mention of Canaan in the close of the eleventh chapter, is generally admitted to have been by anticipation. The mind of Saul could suggest no considerations but those of selfishness to secure the fidelity of his followers, or to impeach their wisdom in concealing Jonathan's covenant with David, "*Hear now, ye Benjamites; will the Son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds, that all of you*

[1] Gen. xii. 7.

have conspired against me; and there is none that sheweth me that my son hath made a league with the Son of Jesse?"[1] No more could the natural mind of Abram have looked beyond himself, and the personal and family good or evil, which might have promised or threatened, to attend his removal. But while man would refuse obedience at all, or linger, to calculate and count the cost of following Jesus, in the way of salvation, the Almightiness of his Grace puts forth its hand to the work, and the conquest is complete. "*His people are made willing in the day of his power.*"[2] Thus it is in the heart's affections, when they go forth to meet and do his will. The mind is enlightened to know the state and danger of every unrenewed transgressor, in the land of its idolatry. A spirit of love, and a liberty of the will, arise from the persuasion of divine goodness, wrought upon the soul. The exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel are received in faith: and then, even as our great Redeemer Himself, "*for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame,*" so doth his disciple go forth to his own appointed

[1] 1 Sam. xxii. 7, 8. [2] Psalm cx. 3.

labour and conflict, with the animating hope of the inheritance made over to the saints in light, by the unchangeable faithfulness of their covenant God. His beauty, and the liberty of his service then begin to be understood. That service is known to be perfect freedom: and the more close the soul's communion with its Saviour, the more clearly will his glory, and the true happiness of his service, be discovered; and the more purely will love reign over the mind, to impel its obedience. "*As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God!*"[1]

It was even thus with St. Paul, when the riches of the love of Christ, brought him forth into that mighty change whereby he became the ministerial glory of the Church, which he had so fiercely persecuted. "*When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.*"[2] When the secret, but Omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit, had made an internal discovery of that Son, as God's salvation, and

[1] Psalm xlii. 1. [2] Gal. i. 15, 16.

of his own personal interest in the great redemption, the inwrought change was total; and thenceforth it was Christ to him to live. This is the high, the mysterious, the energetic principle of a believer's life. The love of Christ constrains him: and all the hindrances of the world, the flesh, and the devil, are bidden to get behind him. No influence, short of this moving power from heaven; no motives, less powerful than those which are called into exercise, when Christ is thus formed in the soul, the hope of glory, can subdue its earthliness, and carry it above all temptations, whereby it may be solicited to remain in idolatry and sin. Carnal reasons, counsels, friends, arguments, solicitations, ease, and interest, may plead long and loudly: but their claim will not be admitted. Motives may be urged, as painful to oppose, as would be the plucking out of a right eye, or the excision of a right hand. But when the person of the Saviour, the nature of his service, and the price of his salvation are understood and received, as the revelations of his grace impress them upon the heart, He will gain Himself the victory over its affections.

And when a divine command, with all its promises, and all its privileges in the gospel of

redeeming grace is made known, immediate obedience is the only wisdom. Hesitation is equally guilty and dangerous. "O not so, my Lord," should be far from those, whom the God of grace hath visited with salvation in his Son. Flesh and blood are subtle counsellors; and they have a powerful advocate in the heart's deceitfulness. They are totally unfitted to advise us in spiritual duties: for "the carnal mind is enmity against God." If they cannot hinder obedience entirely, they will gladly deform it, and represent it as the Christian's slavery, rather than his joy and liberty. They will endeavour to turn the mind from choosing the word of God, as the only rule, and the Holy Ghost, as the only Guide; and to transfer all confidence from both to the darkness and delusions of that wisdom of this world, which is foolishness with God. They will endeavour to subdue the life of faith, to the life of sense; and to make the professor of Christianity, when summoned to go forth from his unholy rest, resist the call, and cry, "This is a hard saying, who can bear it?"

"*If God then, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in any heart, to give the light of the knowledge of his own*

glory in the face of Jesus Christ:" [1] and if that heart's approbation hath by faith welcomed the disclosure, as the dearest blessing which a lost creature could experience, or the Most High God communicate, out of the stores of his incomprehensible mercy, when the command to forsake all and follow Christ is given to such a believer, what should be his delighted answer, as he rises in God's strength and his soul's gladness, to make the sacrifice? "*What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*" [2] "I will make haste and delay not, to keep thy commandments." When God restores Ephraim, the first spiritual breath should be employed in crying, "*What have I to do any more with idols?*" [3] If any of you have learned to say, "God forbid that I should glory save only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ;" it becomes you to make known, that you have been the Apostle's follower in that happy experience of his conformity to Jesus—"Whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Nothing can be so effectual

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 6. [2] Phil. iii. 7, 8. [3] Hosea xiv. 8.

as the revelation of a crucified Saviour, made within the heart, to wean it from sin, and to unite its affections in love to the way of a reconciled God.

(II.) Abram's obedience to the divine command, exhibited a feature quite inseparable from the character of a true believer—I mean HIS DEEP SOLICITUDE FOR THE TRUE WELFARE OF THOSE, TO WHOM HE STOOD RELATED IN FAMILY BONDS AND CONNEXIONS. "*He took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran: and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan.*" The servants whom he had bought, they who were born in his house, and they also it would appear, whom he had indeed spiritually gotten, as instrumentally the cause of their conversion, to that faith which wrought so actively within his own heart, were brought out with him. He spared them not a portion in his own trials, through a false and fatal tenderness: but led them forth towards the blessedness of that country, which gleamed so brightly in his own eye and heart of faith.

The promise of the Father, made unto his Son in the sure and everlasting covenant of grace,

declared that He should see his seed, the travail of his soul, in sinners redeemed and restored to God. Therefore did He not only die for them, the just for the unjust, as their atonement and ransom—therefore did He not only give them the merit of his righteousness, as their unchallengeable title to eternal life, when they truly believe; but He goes to seek and to save that which was lost. He waits, in his unrivalled patience, at the door of hearts, closed by unbelief, locked by all the stratagems of Satan, barred by self-will, and guarded by the strong man armed, until his Holy Spirit doth the work of his love, opens Him an entrance, and leads the affections forth to follow Him, by the light and impulse of his own love.

And when a Christian is himself awakened to find, that by the blood of the covenant, God hath brought him out of the horrible pit of his alienation, from the family of heaven, and set him in the way of life, and promised him guidance thither, and glory as its consummation, will he not put forth his hand, in the very act of rising to follow Christ, towards others, that they also may be one with him? Will not his heart melt over the miseries of those, with whom the arrangements of providence have connected

him in the relations and dearest characters of life, to pluck them also as brands out of the burning: and to say, "Come with us, who go forth with Jesus, and we will do you good?" When Moses was commanded to lead Israel from the bondage of Egypt, it did not content him to have the multitude of God's host delivered He would have even the sheep and oxen of the people included in the freedom to be wrung from the unwilling hand of Pharaoh. "*There shall not a hoof be left behind.*" And did it satisfy the father of the faithful to lead forth Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and to leave all the rest of his household within the forbidden verge of the idolatries of Chaldea? Assuredly not. Although he had not yet been blessed with children, there were others beside his wife, over whom a charge had been given him—a charge of weighty and solemn responsibility, to bring them forth. He had servants, and he laboured to win them. He had souls in his household, spiritually given to him, as he declared the counsel of God to them, and as a blessing rested upon his endeavours to make them companions of his way. Authority was added to precept and example; and all his family took their pilgrimage with him towards

the land of promise, as the light of promise led them thither.

And who shall tell how greatly the example of Sarai's obedience to Abram's will must have influenced those around her? She appears to have offered no resistance to the divine command; to have pleaded no bar against her husband's prompt obedience: she was therefore blessed in her deed. And when the two great centres of influence, around which all family movements mainly revolve, coincide in harmony of mind to the will of God, and the love of Christ, and the delight of his way, the course of those inferior movements, (if I may so speak, which constitute the family system, may hopefully be expected to illustrate the power and beauty of family religion. When a believing husband and wife, walk as heirs together of the grace of life, their example will not be barren of imitation; for God's blessing will attend it. Never then, confine your spiritual solicitudes for others, to the closest and dearest relations of life. Bring the love of Jesus to bear upon your hearts, and expand them, until they embrace all within the sphere of your influence, and lead them, with yourselves, to the fold and pasture of the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. A

great father of the Christian church [1] observed, that the devil prevailed to make the heathen wicked, with no common success, but rather with especial power, by those fictions, which attributed all the sins that defile the world, not to men, originally, but to the deities, in whom they were called to believe: so that the foulest sin was sanctioned by the highest example. How carefully should the heads of families apply this truth to themselves. Let not the inferiors around you, think themselves safe and warranted in unbelief and sin, because they can plead you as their pattern. God hath set you as stars in the firmament, by which others may guide their course. And if while they look to you, and follow, as you may direct, they fall into iniquity, rebellion against God, rejection of Christ, slavery to the lust of the flesh, or the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life, and thus into the death eternal, will that God and Governor who placed them under your care, hold you guiltless for misleadings so dreadful?

If, on the other hand, they who "*convert a sinner from the error of his ways, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of*

[1] St. Augustine's Confessions.

sins,"[1] that radiance will suffer no eclipse, because they for whom you laboured, watched, prayed, poured forth such instruction, as had made yourselves wise unto salvation, and provided such examples as became the disciples of the Lord, lived within the walls and doors of your own habitations, or within the dearer dwellings of your own converted and gracious hearts. Families would become holy, were the heads of families renewed by the Spirit of God, and anxious for their households. And thus, nations themselves would become mountains of holiness, and seats for the throne of God where He would be glorified. None indeed can enkindle the life of God within the soul, save "He who hath his fire in Zion and his furnace in Jerusalem." But the instruments I have mentioned are of divine appointment; and were they well employed, casting themselves upon the presence and power of the Holy Ghost, their labour of love would not be in vain.

(III.) THE OBEDIENCE OF ABRAM, MANIFESTED AN ENTIRE SURRENDER OF HIMSELF TO THE DIVINE GUIDANCE. "He went out not knowing whither he went." It is common

[1] James v. 20.

in the naval warfare and enterprizes of nations, to send a ship or a fleet with sealed orders for ulterior operations. These instructions are not to be opened by the commander, until he shall have reached a certain latitude and longitude, of which he is previously apprized. He may speculate upon the order, but he presses towards the mark, where further light and knowledge will be communicated; and he does well. It was thus with Abram. He knew little—nay he knew nothing of the promised land; probably not even of the way to it: yet he went onward, and desired no halting place, until God Himself should make the discovery. Now this is God's requirement from faith and it is the high exercise of faith to obey the command. When our Lord stoops to wash the disciples' feet, Peter is amazed at the condescension of his glorious Lord, and would oppose his purpose. "*Thou shalt never wash my feet.*" But the Lord promises future light to clear the mystery. "*What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.*"[1] The Lord declares the absolute necessity of that spiritual law, which his gracious act typified. "*If I wash thee not,*

[1] John xiii. 6, 7.

thou hast no part in me." Immediately the whole Apostle's mind is bowed down to entire submision—"*Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!*" It is a consideration, to still all fears, and hush all doubts within a believer's heart, while he goes on a darkling way of present providence, that God's own hand is leading him: and that, though it doth not yet appear what he shall be, he knows that he shall be like his Saviour, for he shall see Him as He is, at the end of his pilgrimage.

Abram's resting place was promised, but not revealed. He had no cloudy pillar to lead him; no angel of the covenant, to go, as it were, before him, in visible majesty; and to hold a manifest shield of protection over him: yet he cast himself in faith upon the divine conduct; and went forth unhesitatingly; not knowing whither he went. That same God, who raised the righteous man from the East, called him also to his foot; made him willing to follow the law and way of his appointed course, and to cast all the care of the pilgrimage, where it would be surely and safely borne. And this is the legitimate exercise of faith;—not to dispute; but to obey. When God, in the mysteries of his dealing "leads the blind by a way that they know not;"

it never becomes them to say, "We will not follow, until our eyes shall be opened, and we ourselves assured of the fitness of our journey:" for thus would man contend with God, and be wiser than his Maker. Thus would the blind eye think it saw better than the God who formed it: and the deaf ear, that it heard more distinctly than He who made it capable of receiving sound. If patience hath its perfect work —if the Christian lose not his confidence in God, nor fall into unbelief, his feet will not stumble on the dark mountains of any providential trial. The promise will be his light, while the providence may lower around him. It should be enough for faith to lean upon the Saviour's breast in love, while preparing to follow Him; without desiring to know the counsels of his heart, until his wisdom sees the fitting time for disclosing them. If infinite love has appointed the end of every Christian's course, to be with the Redeemer in his realm and glory; and if infinite wisdom has devised the sure means of attaining it, then faith may be well contented, simply to ask the question, "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?"—to place body, soul, and spirit, with all their movements, hopes, and solicitudes, at the disposal of an

unerring God, and to say, "*Behold the servant of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word.*" While faith, like the draughtsman's compass, hath one foot fixed in God, as its immoveable centre, the other limb may be safely permitted to go round at its appointed distance, and the circle will be at last complete. "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things will be added unto you.*" The Lord may constrain his disciples to go into the ship; the wind may be contrary; and they may be for a while buffeted with the storm. But He will come to them, in his own good time, though He walk in much gloom upon the sea to approach them; and they will reach the land in safety, peace, and joy.

(I.) *I may be addressing some, who like Abram, when the God of glory appeared to him, are dwelling contented in a land of idolatry and sin.* Surely a message of life and mercy, hath been vouchsafed to you. An offended and neglected God has not allowed you to remain ignorant of your state, your duties, and your hopes, unless the curtain of that ignorance be drawn by your own resolved hand around you. If you are idling away the hours of life and salvation, amidst the frivolities of the world's

pleasures, or the vain nothingness of its more serious pursuits, you cannot plead that no man hath hired you. The gospel hath been preached unto you. The ambassadors of Christ have besought you. A voice hath come again, and again, from the well-head of mercy in the great salvation of the Son of God, crying, "*Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!*" [1] "*Turn ye, turn ye; for why will ye die?*" [2] Pardon, which lost angels need, but shall never have, hath been offered to you. Blood of atonement, which, touching their fetters of righteous judgment, would have made them free as the sons of God, but of which they must never know the efficacy, hath been poured forth by the Saviour for human sinners. God who passed those angels by, and left them in despair, hath taken your nature, to deliver it. And lo, He calls you to be happy. He knows that you cannot be happy, as unbelievers and idolators; and such are all the world's votaries, and all the slaves of that reason in divine things, which scorns what it cannot comprehend, and will be wiser than the Most High Himself, in proposing a scheme of salvation for mankind.

[1] Isaiah lv. 1. [2] Ez. xxxiii. 11.

While thus remaining in your dark infidelity, you are making light of God's own message of love. Arise, while yet the day of mercy shines around you. Get you out of the country of your idolatries, to serve the living God. Get you from your kindred, the children of this world, who are lying under the sentence of his curse. Get you from your father's house—the house of the god of this world, where you have no birthright, except that of wrath and condemnation; and betake yourselves unto that land, which the Holy Ghost waits to show you, in the length and breadth of its beauty. Take your part with the saints of God, whose portion is the all-sufficient Saviour; and be blessed with them, both in your pilgrimage and your rest.

II. *Are any sojourning in Haran, by the way, instead of pressing on towards Canaan?* Abram waited there five years; probably induced by the increasing infirmities of his father: and when the grave had closed over Terah, he needed a second message, before he struck his tent, to complete the remainder of his way, and to follow the bidding of his Lord. O believers in Jesus, whose fleetness in the Christian course hath been dishonourably slackened, you have much need to exercise strict vigilance and honest

dealing with yourselves; lest your dearest earthly duties become your hindrances. Let the dead bury their dead; but go ye and follow Jesus. You did run well, who hath hindered you? Redeem the time. Intreat God the Spirit to, plume again the wings of your failing faith; and to bear you above the earthliness which hath checked your heavenly flight, and made your souls cleave to the dust, "*Count not yourselves to have already attained, either to be already perfect.*"[1] Observe the activity of many before you; and the joy and peace wherewith they are blessed and strengthened. "*Arise ye and depart; for this is not your rest: because it is polluted.*"[2] You have no abiding city, until after a finished course, and a good fight of faith, triumphantly finished, you shall be led within the borders of Immanuel's land. If God hath removed any dear friend, while you have been loitering in your spiritual race, should not the bereavement address you in the voice of his love, and with the solemnity of a merciful solicitation, for your recovery and restoration? Doth not that voice say to you, as it said to the prophet in Horeb, "What doest thou here?" And

[1] Phil. iii. 12. [2] Micah ii. 10.

have you a better answer than that of the prophet's timid and slothful withdrawal from his post of duty? If you love fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ—if you would be strengthened with might by God's Spirit in the inner man—if you would grow in grace, and in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour—if you would have an entrance ministered unto you abundantly into his everlasting kingdom, turn your faces Zionward at once; and arise to follow the call of God. And then, as the gales of Arabia send forth the fragrance of its spices, to refresh the traveller thitherward, and to strengthen him for his remaining journey, so will consolations from the land of blessedness refresh you, and enable you to go on your way rejoicing.

SERMON VI.

THE NATURE AND ORIGIN OF FAITH.

HEBREWS XI. 8.

BY FAITH ABRAHAM, WHEN HE WAS CALLED TO GO OUT INTO A PLACE WHICH HE SHOULD AFTER RECEIVE FOR AN INHERITANCE, OBEYED, AND HE WENT OUT, NOT KNOWING WHITHER HE WENT.

IT is remarked by an eminent moral writer,[1] 'that whatever withdraws us from the power of our senses, whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future, predominate over the present, advances us in the dignity of thinking beings.' The assertion is unquestionably true; and when extended to embrace the relations which men bear to the invisible world, and to comprehend the laws of their spiritual being, together with their responsibilities Godward, as creatures under a gracious revelation of their

[1] Dr. Johnson.

Maker's will, it is their greatest safety, their best wisdom, and their highest honour, not to look to the things which are seen, which are temporal, as their dearest good, but to the things which are not seen, which are eternal. This is the life of faith,—the life of every Christian, renewed by the Spirit of God, and made one in mind and membership with his Saviour Jesus Christ. It is the life of wisdom, and blessedness, which St. Paul had realized, when he cried, "*I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.*"[1]

This principle of faith was the mighty leverage whereby Abram was separated from all the natural and habitual attractions, that bound him to his country, his kindred, his father's house, and his father's idols. It was the impelling motive of all his future journies, and abidings; the staff whereon he leaned; and the wisely chosen guide of all his procedures. Such is the testimony given of him by the Apostle—such the good report made of him by

[1] Gal. ii. 20.

the Holy Ghost.[1] We have seen the first movement in his eventful pilgrimage towards Canaan. Before we accompany him on his progress, it seems desirable to examine this great power of faith, whereby he was carried through all duties, and raised, as on eagles' wings above temptations. And oh, that the same high and victorious grace may be vouchsafed to us, in our pilgrimage and warfare; making us more than conquerers, through Him who loved us; that we may be blessed with faithful Abraham!

I. Our inquiry must obviously commence with THE NATURE OF FAITH.

We shall vainly look to any other quarter for a description of this grace, (in the exercise of which the saints of the Most High have passed, are passing, and must pass, to the rest that remaineth for the people of God,) so clear and comprehensive as that given by the Apostle, (Heb. xi. 1.) "*Faith is the substance of things hope d for, the evidence of things not seen.*" It is the sure foundation, on which the soul rests in expectation of those things, towards which its hopes, its desires, and all its holy longings are

[1] Heb. xi. 8—19.

directed. It is that inwrought persuasion of the mind, whereby a present subsistence and being are given to those blessings, which God's own revelation hath promised, as the portion of his saints.[1] It is that refutation of atheistical doubts and arguments—that sure and certain persuasion of invisible realities, which is the heart's true, and (when it rises to the assurance of faith) the heart's untroubled rest. It is that spiritual sight, whereby Abraham saw the day of Christ, nineteen hundred years before it broke upon the earth, in the incarnation, and in which his soul rejoiced. It is the Holy Ghost's demonstration of those truths, which our senses cannot realize. Eternal life is promised to the dead in trespasses and sins. A blessed and glorious resurrection is declared to the children of God. But in the mean time their bodies must lie down in the corruption of the grave. The believer in Christ is pronounced perfectly righteous in his Father's sight; yet sin dwells within him. An unspeakable and eternal weight of glory is assured to him; and yet, he feels himself beset with sorrows. Faith then looks through the present cloud, and discerns

[1] Compare Rom. viii. 24, 25, with Heb. xi. 1.

God, in all his truth, and all his love behind it. It reckons therefore, that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the bliss that shall be revealed in the holy members of the family of life, when they shall be finally and for ever "*translated from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*"[1]

In examining this divine grace, the principle of all holy obedience, and, in its exercise, the clear light and faithful director of Abram's way; I propose to consider it rather under its general character, as a simple affiance in the God of Truth, than with especial or exclusive reference to that justifying faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, which, as its more peculiar office and benefit, makes every believer "the righteousness of God in Him." This more especial view of faith, wherein Abram was so largely blessed, both as an individual, and as the earthly federal head of God's believing church, will be the subject of a future examination. I am now therefore, not so immediately speaking of that faith which justifies the ungodly, by giving him an interest in the person and work of the Lamb

[1] Rom. viii. 21.

of God; but rather of that faith, which is the great element of progress in the spiritual life. I speak of that faith which simply takes God at his word, whatever that word testifies or commands—which carried Abraham forward in hopeful expectation of deliverance and happiness, amidst all the pressures of present sufferings; making him adventurous to act, and strong to endure; even as his posterity cast themselves cheerfully into the depths of the Red Sea, and passed through them boldly, obeying the command; because they looked for the promised deliverance of God. Faith then, thus considered, holds the light to hope; and enables its happy possessor to see that glorious future, which is discernible by no other lamp. Faith cheers the Christian's onward way, by shewing him what stupendous realities of happiness are enfolded in the promises; and most particularly, by directing him to the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, with all its great salvation. It hangs upon his arm, as that impregnable shield from the armoury of God, whereby he is able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. When the Christian warrior takes that sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; faith, to use the prophet's lofty

style,[1] "bathes it in heaven;" gives it a resistless edge and temper, by mingling the truth and faithfulness of God in his covenant, with all the exceeding great and precious promises; and by that individual application, which the Holy Spirit imparts, as the Teacher and Comforter of the Church.

Faith is not merely an assent of the understanding, clear perhaps, but cold and unfruitful; although knowledge is absolutely necessary to its very existence; since no man can believe that, of which he is ignorant; and since every man's belief will be usually in proportion to his acquaintance with the subject, on which it must be exercised. With what diligence, therefore, with what fervent aspirations of the soul for the illumination and teaching of the Holy Spirit, should all, who look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, search those Scriptures, which testify so fully and amazingly of Him; that thus they may become wise unto salvation, through faith that is in Him! "*He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him:*"[1] for the mere knowledge of his being, power, and holiness, will no more attract

[1] Isaiah xxxiv. 5. [2] Heb. xi. 6.

a guilty rebel to Him, without some persuasion of his readiness to receive, to pardon, and to bless, than they would have drawn Adam to Him, when sin had poisoned, perverted, and destroyed, all the heavenward affections of his soul. Paul knew in whom he had believed; and therefore was persuaded, with a joy unspeakable and full of glory, that his covenant God in Christ Jesus was able to keep that which he had committed unto Him, against that day. No man, looking round, as he dreads the coming deluge of God's wrath against iniquity, can say in the transport of effectual faith, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul," until he hath been shewn the unsearchable mercies of God in Christ, as the ark of his refuge. Then he closes in very deed, to his present and eternal repose, with the invitation of his Lord, "*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*"[1] Every glorious attribute of God, seen in the face of Jesus Christ, then becomes a support, on which faith freely and boldly casts itself. But until each and every one is so known, they will appear like rocks and quicksands, ready to dash in pieces, and engulph every hope of a sin-convinced and

[1] Matt. xi. 28.

heart-stricken man. Faith, thus grounded in knowledge, works by love, purifies the heart, and overcomes the world.

Perhaps it may be inquired, wherein consists the difference between Faith and Hope, two of that great triad of principles, which are said to abide in the church, (1 Cor. xiii. 13.) as they have their being and operation within the hearts of the family of heaven? These graces are indeed linked very closely together, but there is no confusion between them. Faith substantiates and realizes, evidences and demonstrates, those glorious objects, which lie so far beyond the reach and sphere of sense. It is constantly sent forth to forage in the invisible regions of the spiritual world, for the maintenance of this life. It brings thence the provisions, on which hope feeds, and whereby the heart is renewed and strengthened. Future blessedness is equally an object of faith and hope: of *faith*, as it is present in the promises of God, and the believer's heart; of *hope*, as it is yet to come. Faith is the ground of hope. Faith believes, and hope expects. Faith closes with the word of God, wherein the Christian's blessedness is assured; and hope is carried forth towards the subject of the promise. Faith

instates the Christian in the things promised, and persuades him of their truth; hope looks for the manifestation of them in possession. Faith is the hand, and hope the eye of the soul. Faith awakens hope, and then hope comes forth to repay the kindness, by supporting and cherishing faith.[1] Thus upheld, the early patriarchs, those men renowned in the annals of redemption, "*all died in faith, not having received the promises; but, having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them, and embraced them;*" and looked in hope to enjoy their substance and reality in Christ and in his salvation.

(1.) Faith, when called into vigorous exercise, is an *adventurous grace*, encouraging the spiritual merchantman to sell all that he hath, and buy the pearl of great price; inciting the spiritual miner to count all things but loss, that he may make the hidden treasure in the gospel field his own; persuading the lover of true riches to overlook or lightly regard all present possessions, compared with that "*inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.*"[2]

[1] Manton's Works, III. 3.

[2] 1 Pet. i. 4, 5.

It is willing to cast itself wholly upon God, and to look to Him as its *all*, as well as its *own*. "*Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon the earth that I desire besides Thee?*"[1]

(2.) Faith is a *patient grace*. It can cleave to the promise, and hold there, without letting it go; though sometimes, perhaps, weary with its grasp. It can leave the time which God may choose for the accomplishment of his purposes of love, to his will. It can say to the soul concerning the intentions and undertakings of a faithful God, as Naomi said to Ruth, when her cause and happiness were at issue. "*Sit still, until thou know how the matter will fall; for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day.*"[2] God will always do for his children exceeding abundantly above all that they can ask or think; even as Canaan was the literal promise to Abram; but endless life and blessedness, the reality that lay beneath the type. The father of the faithful was therefore well contented to allow Jehovah's wisdom to regulate the whole procedure; and to sit at his feet, or follow Him in the way.

[1] Psalm lxxiii. 25.

[2] Ruth iii. 18.

In due season the Christian shall reap, if he faint not. God is the best judge of the time when his mercies shall be most happily distributed; his glory most effectually manifested; and the birth of his people's blessedness made more remarkable and illustrious. And when a spirit of grace and supplication is poured out upon the heart to plead, and faith hath its gracious exercise in prayer, the moment of deliverance and of accomplished promise is near at hand; even as the redemption of Israel followed hard upon the cry and groaning of the people, in the land of their bondage.

(3.) Faith is the *highest and most renowned of all those graces*, wherewith the Christian is endowed, for likeness and conformity to his Lord. All other virtues, indeed, are the daughters and descendants of faith. In the eternal state of joy and glory to body and soul, love will be supreme; but faith obtains the victory to the Church militant upon earth. Love takes possession of the happiness that shall be imparted; but faith gives the title in Christ Jesus, to its enjoyment. It influences every other exhibition of the Saviour's mind, whereby the heirs of salvation adorn his doctrines in all things. *All the rest of the daughters have done*

virtuously, but this excelleth them all.[1] We apprehend by faith; (if indeed we are apprehended of Christ Jesus, in the sovereignty of divine mercy,) that we may enjoy by love. Love unites God with his saints in their ultimate felicity, but faith in the Redeemer first united them to Him, as members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. In short, faith hath been well described by one in other days,[2] as the best gift to man; the soul of his soul; the spring and fountain of all holiness; the great feature of the sons of God; the key whereby the treasures, that are laid up in the fulness of the Saviour, are opened to his brethren, the joint heirs of his kingdom. It is the mother of sound joy; the watchful and tender nurse of a good conscience; the pledge of an eternal inheritance; the earnest of peace with God; the seal of election; the way of ascent from earth to heaven; the token of union with Christ, when directed to Him as its object: and the band is as indissoluble as beautiful, whereby the soul of its happy possessor is bound to all the promises, and to the glory of which they testify. Lord, enable us thus to appreciate

[1] Prov. xxxi. 29.

[2] Ball on Faith, p. 131.

this grace in its preciousness! Lord, increase our faith!

(4.) It is a *laborious, self-denying grace.* "*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place, which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.*" While it hath an eye to see Emmanuel, as the great Master whom the ransomed of the Lord are bound to serve; it hath a hand to labour in his cause, and a will to glory in that service, as the soul's perfect freedom. The same grace which delights to receive the promise, springs forth to obey the command. And there is no truth in the volume of God's unerring counsel more sure, nor yet more solemn to a professing Christian—(may his Spirit impress it deeply upon our hearts,) than that which declares, that, "*as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*" [1]

(5.) Faith, when directed to the Son of God, *is peculiarly a grace of redeemed man.* It discovers the excellences of the appointed Saviour, as the Gospel testifies of them all; and his infinite fitness to fulfil the amazing office

[1] James ii. 26.

which his unimaginable love charged upon Him. It discovers also his especial relation to the lost and guilty creatures, whose nature He undertook, for their salvation. The angels see his goodness, and adore Him for its exercise, with hallelujahs, louder and more sweet, than can be uttered by the hosts of the ransomed, upon earth. They desire to look into the rich provision made by Him, for bringing many sons and daughters unto glory; but they can never believe in Christ, for salvation, and therefore can never taste the sweetness of faith, as it fills a believer's heart with light and gladness. The unsinning angels have not fallen under the curse of God; and therefore cannot need an atonement, and a substitute to bear his infinite wrath against iniquity. The angels who kept not their first estate, are reserved unto judgment, and for ever excluded from all participation in his love. How dear then, in this view, should be the life of faith, connecting as it does the believer with the Lord of life and glory, as a brother and a portion, and placing elect and unsinning angels in their proper relation towards the household of God, "as *ministering spirits sent forth to minister unto them who shall be heirs of salvation!*" [1]

[1] Heb. i. 14.

(6.) Faith is a grace of *unspeakable comfort to its happy possessor.* It leads him to the Rock that is higher than himself. It is a refuge in every danger; a solace in every trial; a hope among all billows; a light in all darkness; a star in all gloom; a constellation indeed, whereby to sail upon the dismal and stormy sea of life. The joy of faith is that, with which a stranger cannot intermeddle; for it cometh down from above. It is the product of an atmosphere, into which nothing entereth that defileth. It brings the Physician of the Gospel and the balm of Gilead to the bruised and broken heart. It makes "*the light affliction which is but for a moment work for the believer a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while he looks not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.*"[1] And therefore did the Lord who knew the need of his brethren, and was Himself the exhaustless storehouse of their consolations, direct them, in every temptation, to exercise faith upon Him. "*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*"[2]

(7.) Faith is a *prudential grace.* It weighs

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. [2] John xiv. 1.

the objects which the god of this world and the God of heaven offer to its notice, in the balances of right reason,—that is, of reason enlightened by the truth-giving influence of the Holy Spirit; and decides accordingly. It measures them by the cubit of the sanctuary. It assays the ore offered as a possession, according to the infallible test of Scripture; and casts away the dross, however glittering, to secure the gold, however dark and unpromising it may now appear. And here faith follows the pattern, not only of Abram, but of Abram's great exemplar, "who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame." It freely surrenders all the perishing vanities of time and sense; all the fashion of this world which passeth away; all the pleasures of sin that are but for a season; with whatever seductions the devil may invest them, to follow God, to have a portion with his family, and an instatement in his inheritance of salvation. Carnal and sensual men will stigmatize this choice as folly; but faith is taught of God, and hath made a better estimate. The Christian discovers a snare and defilement, under the gilded allurements of a world that lieth in wickedness; because he surveys them through the truth-giving

medium of the Scriptures, and of God's decision in his word; as Judas saw the blood of his master, and another image than Cæsar's upon the money for which he sold the Saviour—with this happy difference, however, that faith sees and knows the utter worthlessness of the bribe, and, therefore, indignantly rejects it; and on the other hand hath learned the preciousness of Christ, who must be betrayed, unless the price of the treason against Him be trodden under foot. Sight and sense think much of this world, and meanly of that to come, with all its untold and unimaginable depths of blessedness; just as one ignorant of astronomy, would think the earth on which he dwells, the most stupendous object in the universe; and the great lights of heaven; to be only the twinkling sparks which they appear to his eye. But he, who hath learned to measure the distances, revolutions, and bulk of the worlds around him in the vastness of space, is aware that his own little planet is but as a speck in the system, and estimates it, and the mighty centres of other worlds accordingly. Faith therefore, the knowledge of a mind truly enlarged, (for God hath taught it,) resists the solicitations of the flesh, whereby others are led captive; beholding sta-

bility and preciousness only in those promises 'which have the oath of God to make them sure, and the love of God to make them sweet.'[1]

Are these indeed the characteristics of faith? Did they distinguish Abram in his walk? Are they the features whereby every spiritual descendant of this great parent and pattern of the Christian church must be distinguished? Is it true that without faith it is impossible to please God? Then if the language of every heart could be heard, as God surely hears it, in what voice ought it to speak, and what sentiments ought it to convey to the mind? Surely the expression of one voice, the outpouring of one thought—a language of the spirit as identical in every individual, as the world's one speech before it was confounded at Babel—"*Lord, we believe; help thou our unbelief!*"

Having thus described some particulars in the NATURE of Faith, it remains very briefly to seek

II. ITS ORIGIN.

And we are ignorant of the very alphabet of all saving truth, if we cannot trace it to its home in heaven, and its birth, in the power of God upon man's heart. Faith is

[1] Spurstowe on the Promises. P. 26.

a virtuous principle; and therefore, like every other good and perfect gift is from above. Unbelief is the natural element of man, as respects all his transactions with spiritual things. And while he is obliged to live by faith upon his fellow worms, who are crushed before the moth, whose counsel is folly, and their strength weakness; he turns away from God, in absolute distrust concerning every part of his spiritual existence, prospects, duties, and hopes. "*Without God in the world*" is stamped upon all his procedures. O the wretchedness and misery of the fall! The ruin into which man was precipitated by sin hath no deeper or darker gulph, (save that which shall for ever close over his lost soul if he come not to Christ) than the unbelief that reigns within him, and which in his own strength, were he even willing to be delivered, he could no more escape, than he could throw off the world's weight, if he were buried beneath it. Man, in the very act of leaving God, by the first transgression, turned his gaze wholly towards sensible objects, and hath no desire to credit divine revelation. Pride is his besetting sin; and as faith can be only grounded in humility, an unconverted man cannot live in belief on God. "*The carnal mind is enmity against*

Him."[1] Corrupt and darkened reason is the adversary of faith: and even as a fallen man sets up his own will against the *law*, so doth he direct his own imaginary wisdom against the *wisdom* of the Most High. Sensuality and the love of sin, so entirely occupy the avenues to many hearts, that faith may not find entrance; and the God of this world blinds the eyes of them that believe not. He must be resisted by the Christian soldier, steadfast in the faith: and therefore unbelief is, so to speak, his victory. And the advantage gained by him through unbelief, is great and deadly.

Whence then hath the life of faith its rise and origin? What is the fountain of its being and flow within the heart of man? It is exclusively the gift of God, in his Trinity of persons. It is a bestowment of the *Father*, when it fixes the soul on Christ; "for no man can come to Him as a Saviour, except the Father draw him." It is a communication of the *Son;* because He is emphatically the Author and Finisher of our faith. It is a work of the *Holy Spirit;* because He takes of the things of Christ and shews them to the heirs of the kingdom, and fastens them

[1] Rom. viii. 7.

upon the heart. Wherefore He is called the Spirit of faith, because this blessed grace is of his free gift and operation.

They who receive the Lamb of God—(and without such reception of Him by faith there is no salvation) have power given to them by Him, to become the sons of God. But they are brought and born into this infinitely precious relation, *not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*[1] A transcendent power was put forth in raising Jesus from the grave, when the sins of the world, with all their tremendous weight, lay upon Him to crush Him down. That same power which raised Him, and was therefore the mere and absolute act of Omnipotence, enlightens the will, subdues the rebellious mind, and is, by faith, the resurrection of the soul from its death in trespasses and sins. "*Unto you first,*" saith the Apostle, addressing the church at Philippi, "*it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for his sake.*"[2] "*By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.*"[3] And this Apostolic position is as entirely true,

[1] John i. 13. [2] Phil. i. 29. [3] Ephes. ii. 8.

concerning the faith of God's word, which overruled Noah to build the ark, or Abram to leave his country, as concerning that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, whereby He becomes to its happy possessor the end of the law for righteousness. If the hand or eye of man be wanting from his birth, only Almightiness can supply them. By what other power then, shall that hand of faith be created, which reacheth to heaven, and lays hold of all its fulness in the tree of life? By what other power shall that spiritual eye be formed, and opened in the soul, which beholds those things within the vail, and regards them as a believer's rightful and unalienable portion, in the testament of God's free, eternal, and unchangeable mercy by Jesus Christ?

But although faith be thus a gift, resulting from the pure unmerited benevolence of God, yet must it be sought in the use of means. Marriage was never regarded as superfluous for the propagation of mankind, because the soul of the child is not generated by its parents, but created and infused by God; even so, the fact, that faith is given to man by spiritual infusion, should rather quicken than abate his desire to obtain it. Now faith comes instrumentally by

hearing, and hearing by the word of God. 'But this word,' the unbeliever will say, 'is spiritually discerned; and the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God;' how then can I obtain faith by hearing or reading the word of God; when faith is presupposed, in any profitable acquaintance with it?' A view of God in the sovereignty of his grace, is the key to unlock this difficulty. It is the only means of putting to shame, this poor objection of infidelity. The action of the Holy Ghost, creating faith in us, goes before the exercise of faith. But the beginning of faith is the receiving of the Holy Ghost. And if the word of God is become dear to any of you—its spiritual meaning more plain than heretofore,—and He of whom it testifies, more precious than formerly to your hearts—then have you already a spiritual discernment; and your faith will be increased in the study of the scriptures of God. Read the holy volume. Pray, as God may enable you, for light to understand, and faith to receive, and love to embrace it. And then, as Jesus bade the man with the withered hand stretch it forth, and the natural impossibility was removed, while he made the effort; so shall you, once infidels concerning all the infinitely

gracious disclosures of the written and revealed Book of life, understand it, and enjoy it in its great Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last of Christian faith and love. Be diligent in the use of all the means of grace: and trust, as you pray, that the grace of means, in faith unto salvation, shall be imparted richly to you. The scales of incredulity will fall away; the eye of simple single minded faith will be opened; and while you look upon the wonders of redemption, which in their length, and breadth, and depth, and height, will be new and delightful to you for ever, you will each cry with him whom the Saviour healed, "*One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.*"

SERMON VII.

THE OBJECTS AND WARRANT OF FAITH.

HEBREWS XI. 8.

BY FAITH ABRAHAM, WHEN HE WAS CALLED TO GO OUT INTO A PLACE WHICH HE SHOULD AFTER RECEIVE FOR AN INHERITANCE, OBEYED; AND HE WENT OUT, NOT KNOWING WHITHER HE WENT.

IN those complicated machines which exhibit the triumphs of scientific invention and arrangement, there are often movements, contrary to the general direction in which the force is to be applied. An unpractised eye therefore, might easily imagine them rather calculated to diminish or disturb, than to increase the whole effect. But the mechanist himself knows full well that they form absolutely essential parts of his system; and that his work would be inefficient, incomplete, or even useless without them. The whole is constructed on one simple

principle: and these seeming paradoxes are among the most beautiful, although to many, the least intelligible portion of that harmonious adaptation of means to an end, which the inventor's forethought had embraced, in all their beauty and variety. When Ezekiel saw by the river Chebar, that vision, which shadowed forth the course of providential government, there were wheels crossing each other, in a manner that might appear to contradict the simplicity of a straight-forward direction. But the circles thus crossed gave the spherical form, which enabled them to move in any direction, and that with entire uniformity. Whithersoever the Spirit went, they went; and they turned not when they went. That Spirit was at once their impulse and guide; and they accomplished the thing whereto God had sent them, however little the prophet, at first uninstructed, might have expected a result so simple and effectual.[1]

Now such is the life of faith. It is often in apparent contradiction to the suggestions of sight and sense. But "*the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.*"[2] And while mere worldly philosophy looks upon a believer's con-

[1] Ezek. i.

[2] 1 Cor. iii. 19.

versation with wonder, or turns away from the contemplation of what it deems to be utter folly, with great contempt, because it cannot discern and understand the secret springs and movements, which God in Christ supplies, when by the Holy Ghost he fills the heart with faith and love, the great King of his saints is directing and overruling every seemingly discordant motion, to his own glory, and the good of his church. A perfect regularity is there; and every change is the consequence of laws, designed, not by human skill, much less by blind chance and accident, but by the unerring wisdom of Jehovah Himself.

I have already occupied one discourse with some remarks upon the *Nature and Origin of Faith*, as a general principle of obedience. I shall now pursue the subject by examining,

III. The Objects of Faith. In its more enlarged acceptation, it is conversant with all truth revealed by God in his word, and therefore by Him, and by his supreme authority made binding upon every man, into whose hands the Bible falls. That faith, whereby the soul is justified, being invested with the righteousness of God in his incarnate Son, embraces and rests on Christ's obedience unto

death, that believing men may find life in Him. It cleaves to his person and work; cleaves to God's mercies exhibited in his sacrifice, with its unceasing outpouring of the life of mercy, to every one who comes thirsting to its waters, and turning away from every other confidence, to Him as "*made of God, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*[1]

As faith then justifies, He is the full and glorious object of Christian belief. But the truth, mercy, fidelity, and power of God, with all the benefits of his free goodness, past and to come, which it hath pleased Him, or shall please Him, to bestow upon his disciples, are the important and heart-stirring objects, wherein that faith, which is his work upon the soul, is exercised. It embraces the commandments, believes the threatenings, rejoices in the exceeding great and precious promises of the everlasting gospel, made concerning the life that now is, and that which is to come. It does not mangle and divide obedience, rejecting that part of divine requirement which may exact the bearing of a cross, heavy and distasteful to the evil heart of unbelief, and embracing others,

[1] 1 Cor. i. 30.

among which flesh and blood would delight to dwell. The true obedience of a living faith is universal.

God in his attributes, and more especially in his Truth, is essentially the first object of faith. His *goodness* is the immediate object of *love*. His *power* is the centre of *hope:* but his absolute and unchangeable *truth* attracts the eye, and forms the blessed resting place of faith. "*God is not a man that He should lie, nor the Son of man that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it; or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?*"[1] "*He that hath received his testimony, hath set to his seal that God is true.*"[2] Faith therefore rests on Him, as the Father who made and upholds the universe, and all its parts and interests. It looks to Him, as loving the Church in Christ, before the foundation of the world; as that covenant God, who will never leave nor forsake his servants, but supply all their need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus; as the Father of all believers in Himself and his Son, making them the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, as a God pardoning sin, and justifying the ungodly.

[1] Numb. xxiii. 19. [2] John iii. 33.

When turned towards the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world, Faith beholds Him as that "*great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh, whom the Father hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.*"[1] Christ therefore, in his person, and in all his offices; but especially Christ crucified, is the sun and centre of saving faith. All the other parts of revelation conduct faith, as by the hand, to this full, pure, open laver for sin and for uncleanness; to this throne, whereon faith, when it hath reached it, sits and glories in Christ, the wisdom of God, and the power of God, unto the salvation of all them that believe. The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, was the object of the first promise; the reality and acceptableness of every sacrifice; the substance of every type; and the ample fulfilment of the whole law. As faith is exercised unto knowledge in the understanding of God, it comes to Immanuel as its Prophet to be taught. As it is exercised unto sanctification, to cast down the principalities and powers of sin, it regards Him as a King; but as it looks for justification, it magnifies Him, and flies to

[1] 1 Tim. iii. 16. Rom. iii. 25.

the unsearchable, precious atonement of his effectual Priesthood. It beholds, and embraces Him especially in this blessed office, adventuring all the mighty and everlasting interests of the soul upon him, saying with Esther, "If I perish, I perish." It flees to him, as Adonijah and Joab to the horns of the altar. There it knows the sure refuge, and feels that none shall pluck the believing fugitive from that inviolable sanctuary.

And that Holy Spirit, who with the Father and the Son is essential God, in the unity of divine Essence, is a glorious object of Christian belief. The Father will keep the children of his household, and the heirs of his glory, by his power, through faith unto salvation. The Son of God, the word made flesh, hath most triumphantly accomplished that salvation, by his mediatorial undertaking. But who shall commence, who shall carry forward, who shall complete the work of infinite grace, until it have its consummation in unimaginable glory? Surely none other than the Holy Ghost, unto whom the whole mysterious process must be committed; and through whose covenant engagement, brought triumphantly forward to its fulfilment, by the hand of Almightiness, He who

hath begun a good work in the heirs of salvation, will perform it, until the day of Jesus Christ.

Here then are objects, on which faith may be worthily employed; here a length, and breadth, and depth, and height of revealed mercy, with which it may be fittingly conversant, until it shall be swallowed up in the everlasting vision of the glorified. Here is the supply of every want; the inconceivably full and perfect accomplishment of every gracious desire; the balm of infinite efficacy for every malady of that lost body of man, his body of sin and death, whereby the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint; and here are the fountains of those depths of blessedness which are as pure as they are profound.

God himself calls us to the exercise of this grace. He opens all his heart of love to sinners, intreats them to flee from his tremendous sentence in the law that condemns them, and that must crush every hope in the dust, while they lie beneath its penalty. He implores them to betake themselves to the appointed salvation, that they may be "*washed, justified, and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*"[1] And will you

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 11.

indeed remain without? Will not the rent vail, and the view into the holy of holies, the riches of God's love in his Son, induce you to arise, and go to Him by faith? "*When Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another? Behold I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence, that we may live and not die.*"[1] Even so, do we tell you, that that there is an ample and everlasting salvation in the land of God, whither every soul that would not die eternally, must travel; where the Almighty administrator waits in sovereign love to dispense it; and where the hearing and the heart of faith have been blessed, times without number, in the proclamation of mercy: "*Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea, come buy wine and milk, without money and without price: whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.*"[2]

I am very far from asserting that Abram possessed, at this period of his history, the faith which embraced the whole substance of salva-

[1] Gen. xlii. 1, 2. [2] Is. lv. 1, 2.

tion by Jesus Christ, or that such full and clear belief was the supremely operating principle in his heart, when he forsook all the fellowship in which he had delighted. The immediate object of the patriarch's faith, was the possession of Canaan. But his eye rested on something, whereof Canaan was only the type. "*He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*" The basis of his faith was the revelation and promise of God, either expressed or implied; and to this general faith was added, as we are well assured, that whereby he was held righteous before God, as the secrets of salvation in Immanuel were opened to his mind. It must be here observed, that as no man hath seen God at any time, and as the person who appeared to the patriarchs under the name of Jehovah, was the Lord Jesus Christ, so the object of Abram's confidence was the Lord Himself. The character and objects of faith, have been the same under every dispensation of the church. Its *character* has been man's credit given to the divine testimony: its *object* has been Christ as the way, and eternal bliss as the end.

IV. Hence therefore we pass to consider THE WARRANT OF FAITH. It is the word of

God, as the oracle of his truth, the depository of his mind, and the glass, wherein to see those exceeding great and precious promises, of which Christ is alike the sum and the security; and upon which the Holy Ghost, the light of his word, and the light of his church, pours that radiance which enables an open heart to receive and understand it. "*If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.*"[1] We do receive such earthly witness continually, in the things of present concernment. Would God we confined it there; and did not allow its deluding and lying testimony, in the things of salvation, to outweigh the truth of God; in the revelation of his mind. And therefore, inasmuch as his faithfulness exceeds that of men; his power, that of the worms of the dust; his wisdom, the blindness of human folly; his light, the mists of human darkness; his infallibility, the suggestions of human error;—by just so much, (that is, infinitely) should our faith find the warrant for its exercise, in the word of God, rather than in the opinions of men. "*Heaven and earth shall pass away; but that word shall not pass away.*"[2] The moving power,

[1] 1 John v. 9. [2] Mark xiii, 31.

whereby Abram was compelled to leave his home, was confidence. God summoned him to this most hazardous and important journey; and he readily obeyed the summons. Why? There is no other imaginable reason—none at least that will bear examination, except his entire confidence in the character and directions of God. His heart was divinely impressed with the persuasion of safety and happiness, in submitting implicitly to the guidance of Him who gave the command. He deemed it best for himself, and best for his family, to commit himself and all his concerns to a Being so gracious, as faith attested God to be. Moreover, the divine character being to his eye so beautiful, so glorious, so lovely, the confidence demanded from him became the spring of his delight and happiness.[1]

Now the high and glorious attributes of mercy, wisdom, power, love, and truth, residing in God, and upon which, rest the assured execution of that salvation which hath been wrought out for lost and guilty men, in Christ Jesus, can only be known to us from God's declaration of them in his word. He set his

[1] Dwight's Theology, IV. 602.

bow in the cloud; not only to look upon it Himself, and to remember the everlasting covenant made between Him and all flesh; but that Noah also and his descendants, might see the same sign of unchanging mercy; believe it, and rest upon that peace-giving faith. Even so does He put forth his word, the message and assurance of his love; not merely, that He may regard in it the written covenant of salvation, and remember all his promises; but that men also, may look into the same glorious record, and have life, and peace, and joy, and hope that maketh not ashamed, in its pages, filled as they are with love, and by divine fidelity assured of their accomplishment.

Faith pleads this record, and lives upon its certainty and sweetness. "*Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.*"[1] We can see God savingly no where else: and when that word hath found entrance into the mind, as the Holy Ghost unlocks it, the desires of its awakened affections come forth to plead the fulfilment of all the promises. "So do as thou hast said." Faith realizes, faith appropriates the terrors of the

[1] Psalm cxix. 49.

law, and saith, 'I am he whom they threaten, and I perish for ever, if they fall upon me.' Faith in the day of the soul's glad espousals to Christ, as He is revealed within the heart, and takes possession of it as his own, embraces pardon, life, holiness in Him, by the Scripture, exclaiming, "Unto me is the word of this salvation sent." And, thus embracing, thus possessing, faith prepares to follow God through all the way of his commandments; and in the path of a holy self-denial, wherein the disciples of the Lord are commanded to walk.

And surely this glorious word hath a message unto all—a summons full of love to every man; that he may receive it by faith. It saith unto the wicked, "*Thou shalt surely die:*" But it adds, "*As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth; wherefore turn yourselves and live ye.*"[1] To the self-righteous idolater of his own merit, it saith, "*By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified:*" but it beckons and points him to "*Christ Jesus, the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*"[2] To the sin-convinced and broken heart, it testifies, that

[1] Ezek. iii. 18; xviii. 32. [2] Rom. iii. 20; x. 4.

"*the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin:*"[1] and invites the weary to Him for rest. To those who are struggling in a fierce conflict with the power of Satan, allied to their own inward sin—the word comes forth in the beauty of its promise, that God will subdue all their iniquities, as well as cast their sins into the depths of the sea. "*I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh. From all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you.*"[2] Are any smitten down into the dust of abasement, by the sense of utter helplessness, in self, and in the powers of natural man? The word declares to such a trembling mourner, "*My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness.*"[3] Is any lamenting over a spiritual barrenness of heart, which seems to allow the production only of thorns and briars, fit but to be burned, instead of bearing fruit to God? The word assures him, that the Eternal Spirit "will pour floods upon the dry ground, and make it bring forth fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." Is any one tempted to fear for present supply? The assurance is given

[1] 1 John i. 7. [2] Ezek. xxxvi. 25. [3] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

in the word, and Christ is the speaker, "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you.*"[1] Approach then, and plead these pledges of eternal truth, made to you in that unchanging word, as the case of each and every one of you may need. Come in your necessity: expect the supply; and "according to your faith, so shall it be done unto you." You have the promise and the oath of God, and if they are not as the pillars of the throne, whereon He sits and reigns, to be the sure resting places of faith, then can we conceive a God without moral perfections—an utter, and an everlasting impossibility.

But, I would most affectionately address those who study the word of God by their reason, rather than by their faith, when they look into it at all—and think natural, without spiritual apprehension, abundantly sufficient to understand it. I would beseech them, not unreasonably to demand more evidence, as they may choose to call it, of the truth of Scripture than God hath seen fit to give. He has vouchsafed enough: and if a mystery or a difficulty should make a reader of Scripture fly off into

[1] Matt. vi. 33.

doubt or infidelity of that word, which to a spiritual eye is plainly stamped with the broad seal of God's veracity, the Most High may justly allow that self-deluded one to believe a lie, and to be eternally ruined in his delusion.

Thomas may say in his guilty incredulity, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." But where is the warrant, that mercy will condescend to this unreasonable infidelity? Where is the warrant, that every demand which unbelief, in its insatiable lust of proof, may see fit to urge, shall be met and granted by a Saviour so insulted, who at the same time unerringly knows the measure of that evidence which most worthily befits Him to give, and should be held sufficient by his creature to receive. "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless, but believing." If the Bible hath been shown to be the word of God, then there is no appeal from its statements. They each and all demand to be received upon peril of our souls. Nor must we dispute a single truth,

which that bright record of holiness and mercy contains, because we may not discover a mass of satisfactory explanation, to fill the ever-craving gulph of incredulity. Our unwillingness to credit God, loves to conceal its practical atheism beneath the flimsy veil of desire after satisfactory proof. "*If it be marvellous in your eyes, should it be also marvellous in mine eyes, saith the Lord of Hosts?*"[1] Those mysteries which excite the wonder and scorn of the rational sceptic, are none to Him who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all.

The Holy Ghost might indeed accumulate the proofs of his word, beyond the possibility even of an unbelieving thought. But then where were the moral agency of man? God makes all his glory of redemption to pass before our eyes in the book of life. If we will not believe upon the evidence which He has been pleased to afford, He will leave us in the darkness of our infidelity, and we must perish in our sins. Abram's evidence of the divine character and call, was such as the subtle refinements of modern scepticism would laugh to scorn. Yet he believed God; he was blessed

[1] Zech. viii. 6.

in his faith; and is now in an elevation of happiness, as much beyond all the good that earth can give, as the counsels of his heavenly guide and portion, the guide and portion of all who are made partakers of like precious faith, are beyond the reach of those who would judge them at the bar of human reason, or the comprehension of those who drop their little pitchers into the sea of God's counsels, and fancy they have fathomed its depths, and exhausted its waters.

If your faith then is to stand and have its warrant, "not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God;" if you are not to be of them who draw back from receiving the bidding of Jehovah unto perdition, but of them who believe to the saving of the soul, you must search the Scriptures. You must search them with true and honest hearts. You must search them, not shrinking with a false and guilty sensitiveness from those truths which may offend your prejudices, and shock the poor formless idol of the reasoning faculty, which so many adore, while they defy the God whom they will not understand. You must expect and desire the lighting down of the arm, and the spiritual weapon of the Holy Ghost which may "cast

down imagination, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God;" and you must be willing that every thought should be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.[1]

Are the great and glorious truths of salvation, on which depend the peace and hope of every man, as they place Christ, his Almighty refuge before him, so difficult, that they cannot be understood? Are they so oppressive and severe, that they ought to be at once rejected? And is death beneath the offer of his salvation, to be preferred before the life it brings? Are those truths so uninviting in their aspect, that there is no wonder why men should turn away from them in dislike? Or, is the testimony whereon they rest, so uncertain, or so unworthy of belief, that it may be safely rejected? Assuredly not. "*If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not; lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*"[2] Examine the Bible, that treasure-house of mercy, with minds befitting those who

[1] 2 Cor. x. 5.

[2] 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

are satisfied, that it has God for its Author; and then, with the needful persuasion, that it hath truth, without any mixture of error for its matter; and then also, that it has the everlasting salvation of man, redeemed in Christ Jesus, for its end and object. Read it, with earnest prayer; that instead of being dazzled and confounded with the amazingly glorious simplicity of redemption, you may know what is the hope of your calling, and what the riches of mercy laid up for the saints, in the light of the grace and glory, to which it points them. Read it; with fervent supplication, that He who gave it, may put it into your hearts, and make it an engrafted word, able to save your souls. You will then have the witness of its preciousness within yourselves. The life of sense will then be subdued to the life of faith. You will then hasten forth from whatever resting place of idolatry and earthliness, God may have found you, the indwellers. You will then "*lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset you; and run with patience the race that is set before you, looking to Jesus.*"[1] Then, as that convicted apostle, of whom we have been

[1] Heb. xii. 1, 2.

speaking, is said to have carried the light and knowledge of his Saviour far into the eastern world, after unsought mercy had restored him from unbelief, and opened all the springs of his love; so you, recovered from the heart's deep and ready infidelity; enabled to cast all your care upon Him who careth for you; and taught some rudiments of the happiness of the life of faith, may be the Redeemer's witnesses among men. Then, as you meet, in his mind of patient forbearance, the scorn of those whom justice leaves in unbelief, because they wish not to retain God in all their knowledge, you may be cheered onwards by the society of some, who may say, beholding the beauty and holy consistency of the walk of faith in your daily conversation, "*We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.*" [1]

[1] Zech. viii. 23.

SERMON VIII.

THE EXERCISE OF FAITH.

HEBREWS XI. 8.

BY FAITH, ABRAHAM, WHEN HE WAS CALLED TO GO OUT INTO A PLACE WHICH HE SHOULD AFTER RECEIVE FOR AN INHERITANCE, OBEYED; AND HE WENT OUT, NOT KNOWING WHITHER HE WENT.

THE Most High invariably deals with man as a reasonable creature, and never demands his belief in any revelation, without communicating abundant evidences of its truth, and divine original. When Moses was sent to deliver Israel from captivity, the wonder-working rod was put into his hands, and the miracles wrought by it, were to attest and authorize his high commission. In like manner, those amazing communications of the Holy Ghost, contained in the Scriptures, bear upon every part of them the broad seal of divine veracity, and demand our entire reception of them, upon an extent

of evidence, which only the perversity of infidelity, loving darkness rather than light, can adventure to deny. But as the pole supports the vine, yet gives no life to its root; so reason, when it has directed the faith of man to the Scriptures of God, as its rule and warrant, must there end its labour, and leave faith in the mysteries of the book of salvation, to draw its being from the Spirit of light and truth, as He does his sovereign work of love upon the heart. And hence, the meanest, as well as the mightiest understanding, is equally capable of salvation beneath that omnipotent influence. Such a faith is no speculative frame of mind, the too frequent result of intellectual pride, which, after all its presumptuous searchings into the hidden things of God, is only dazzled and confounded by them; as one might be, who should climb the summit of a perilous steep with much giddiness of brain, to look upon the sun, when it might be equally well, and much more safely regarded, from the level ground which he had left. Such a belief, I repeat, the act of God within the heart, is an operative principle, and works by love, under the influence of the same eternal Spirit who called it into being.

Having therefore already seen THE NATURE, ORIGIN, OBJECTS, and WARRANT of faith, we proceed to notice

V. THE EXERCISE OF FAITH. In Abram, it was no cold assent of the understanding to the reasonableness of a proposition, while the will remained unmoved, and the affections uninfluenced. It was no body without the soul, no form and mockery of a living principle, as the dead man in his shroud, and coffin, and grave, is a poor semblance of him who breathes, and thinks and labours; but the work of God's own hand. It was life, testified by the acts of life. It led him to go forth at Jehovah's bidding, from all that was dear and tempting to his heart; not knowing whither he went. It led him to sojourn in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; in testimony that he looked for a "*city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.*"[1] It led him to offer up Isaac, his son, the Son of God's own promise; accounting that God was able to raise the miraculously given child from the dead. Faith is

[1] Heb. xi. 8—10.

no idle grace; for then, indeed, were it not a grace, but a counterfeit, the delusive work of Satan, who changes himself into an angel of light, that he may deceive and ruin. As it hath an eye to see Christ, all and in all for salvation, all in grace, and all in glory; so hath it a heart to love Him, and a hand to labour in his cause. It hath not merely a willingness to believe the promises of the everlasting Gospel, which are the wine and milk, the marrow and fatness of spiritual life; but a holy readiness to obey the precepts of that glorious revelation of the blessed God. The title of the land was given to Abram, in the sure promise of the Most High; but the Amorite was in possession: and he must have in his own person no inheritance; no, not so much as whereupon to set his foot, save that, which he borrows as a habitation, and buys as a burial place. Yet does he persist in the obedience of faith, and honours the God of his mercies, by patient continuance in well doing.

Faith chafes and warms the benumbed spirit into love, by contemplating the truth, grace, and compassion of the Saviour; and then works by that love, to do the will of God. Faith, looking upon blessedness to come, in the glass

of the Gospel, longs for that promised glory, and treads the way of God's appointment towards it; like as Israel saw the fruits of Canaan, and desired to possess the land from whence they came. O for a principle thus buoyant, and bearing our hearts upwards, to have their conversation in heaven, and so to dwell with Jesus there, above the world; and to be the impulse, whereby we may tread the wilderness without fainting, and fight the good fight of faith, under the great Captain of our salvation, without shrinking from the conflict!

(1.) *Faith hath a proper exercise in matters of temporal concernment.* While we remain in our earthly house of this tabernacle, our heavenly Father knoweth that the body must be regarded, and that its wants must be supplied, What an awful measure of atheism, do those wants of our perishing frame produce in the mind of men, who live by sight and sense alone! They are up early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness, and dwell in a feverish anxiety after this world's abundance, which has its sad reaction in the listlessness, the palsy, and the death of all spiritual mindedness. We throw the clay and dust, which we thus labour to collect, into those wells of thought and feel-

ing, which ought to be filled with the life of God within our souls; as the Philistines stopped up with earth the fountains which Abraham had digged in Gerar. But, when a man truly begins to live the life of faith, how mighty a relief does he obtain from the corroding and peace-destroying hand of all undue worldly solicitudes! "*He is careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, makes his requests known unto God: and the peace of God which passeth all understanding, keeps his heart and mind by Christ Jesus.*"[1] He seeks first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and rests persuaded that all things shall be added to him, according to the true manner and fitting measure of unerring wisdom. Did Hezekiah take care that the Levites should have their portion, duly provided, and so be encouraged in the law of the Lord?[2] And shall not that covenant God, who calls men in Christ to his kingdom and glory, and (what includes both,) to the supreme blessedness of his service, be careful that they shall want no manner of thing that is good? A believer's *body* is as essentially in covenant with

[1] Phil. iv. 6, 7.

[2] 2 Chron. xxxi. 4.

God, as his *soul* can be; and therefore shall have the provision which it truly needs. Such persuasion does the Eternal Spirit give; and great peace have they who enjoy it, while they cast all their care, for present necessities, as well as for spiritual and everlasting requirements, upon Him, who careth for them. Too much prosperity, would oftentimes unfit the Christian for his spiritual warfare against the world, the flesh, and the Devil; as Saul's armour would have encumbered David, in his battle with the Philistine. The believer is therefore made willing to go forth, with the better, though more simple provision of his sling and his stone. On the other hand, a filial confidence in the grace and wisdom of God, is the tree that sweetens the waters of every affliction, to those who are called to sojourn for a little while in Marah. The Christian's covenant God is Jehovah-Jireh; and in the mount of all difficulties, the Lord will appear for his help. It provides a firm ground, on which faith stands, when it comes before the throne to ask, "Give us this day our daily bread," to know that the kingdom, and the power, and the glory belong to God. The same knowledge provides a like resting for hopeful prayer, that his name may be hallowed, his

kingdom come, or his will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. The hairs of the heads of his disciples are all numbered, and their most minute concerns are his care. Surely then, faith hath its proper and needful exercise in believing, and resting peacefully upon the persuasion, that those distinguished children of mercy and heirs of salvation, who are to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, in the riches of personal experience, and to be filled with all the fulness of God, shall want no manner of earthly good, which their Father may know how to suit to their necessities and prospects, as children yet in the body, and not brought home to their Father's house, or to the paradise of their elder Brother.

(2.) *That pardon of sin, which is linked to the atonement of the Lamb of God, is a happy and a needful subject for the exercise of faith.* Evangelical belief is persuaded miraculously, by the power of the Holy Ghost, that Christ is exalted at God's right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins. It flies with eagerness, which God alone can impart, to the fountain opened in the smitten rock of Christ's humanity, upon the warrant of that invitation, "*Come now, and let us reason*

together; Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they have been red like crimson, they shall be as wool." [1] Faith is the channel opened by the Spirit into the heart, whereby the blessings of the atonement are conveyed thither. It receives that glorious record where the Saviour preached the whole Gospel of his grace. "*God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, to the end that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but should have everlasting life.*" [2] The ambassadors of Christ come, beseeching men in his stead to be reconciled to God. Faith receives their message. Faith confesses in its deep joy, that the coming of the Son of God in human flesh to save sinners is worthy of all acceptation. Faith sees, knows, glories in Him; and prostrates its happy possessor before Him, as convinced Thomas, after the resurrection, crying, "My Lord and my God." Faith discovers the fountain of that pardon in undeserved mercy; and brings the soul weary and heavy laden unto Christ for rest. Faith leans upon mercy alone; and mercy is promised, that men might believe, as God works faith

[1] Isa. i. 18. [2] John iii. 16.

within them. Faith believes that promise which hath enkindled everlasting wonder among all the principalities and powers of heaven: "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin."[1] Faith is poured forth in strong desire, and in the heart's wrestling to obtain the full purification of that mysterious fountain. Faith humbles the soul, and places it side by side with the publican in the temple, to receive a free forgiveness, in the Propitiation of the Cross. It clings to Him, and to his accomplished work of love. It lays hold of the promise; and being persuaded of justification, hath peace with God. Thence also follow, a filial access to the throne of grace; joy in the Holy Ghost, even a joy unspeakable and full of glory. And that joy of the Lord is a believer's strength and boldness in the day of his battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. As the pressure of the air upon our bodies from without, is counterbalanced by a reaction within, which being withdrawn, the incumbent weight would crush us to death; so is it with the soul of an unbeliever; the weight of unpardoned sin, the weight of the wrath of God for sin rests upon him. His own pride acts now against it, and makes him insensible

of the dreadful pressure. But in the judgment-day, (if not before) that inward godless support will be withdrawn; for he will see himself, as he is indeed, a daring rebel against unspeakable mercy. The weight of an offended judge's indignation will then grind him, soul and body, with every hope of both, into powder. "*Examine yourselves therefore, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.*" Draw near to the Redeemer. Know the blessedness of these happy ones, whose sins are forgiven, and whose iniquities are blotted out. Come, and understand the riches of your Lord's grace in pardon; and the price which He paid to obtain it. And come for that true joy of the heart, which ever walks in holy fellowship with love to Him, as Enoch walked with God.

(3.) *Faith is also exercised upon the promises of God for sanctification.* "*The blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, is applied by faith, and purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*"[1] Faith purifies the heart. It hides the word of life within the heart, that the children of God may not sin against Him.

[1] Heb. ix. 14.

Having those exceeding great and precious promises, whereby the believer is made a partaker of the divine nature, they enable him to escape the corruption that is in the world through lust; cleansing him from all filthiness of the flesh and Spirit; and exciting him, as the proper bias and employment of his new and noble life, to perfect holiness in the fear of God.[1] Christ's death applied to the heart, when the heart has been led in faith to his cross, is the death of sin there. His entrance into it, and union with it, is the communication and sustenance of a life of holiness. David was constrained to spare Joab, after the murder of Abner, because the sons of Zeruiah were too hard for him. But when the reign of Solomon was established, Joab was seized and slain, even at the horns of the altar. So is it in the experience of all men. While they contend against sin by their own strength, they cannot overcome it; but when the reign of the Saviour in his love is established over the heart, the time of retribution arrives, and the love of Christ slays even the besetting sin without mercy, that He may be avenged of his enemy.[2] The promise is securely

[1] 1 Cor. vii. 1.

[2] 1 Kings ii. 28—34.

made, that God will give his children a new heart, and put his Spirit within them. What He promises, faith receives; and so receiving, exhibits the truth of God in his own word, by "*putting off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and being renewed in the spirit of the mind; and putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*" [1]

Those, whom God acquits of sin, and accepts as righteous unto life, through Jesus Christ, He sanctifies by his Spirit. Communion with the Lord in his death delivers from the curse. Communion with Christ in the power of his resurrection draws the Spirit upwards, to have its hidden and holy life with Him in heaven. "*The grace of God which bringeth salvation... teacheth us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.*" [2] Satan hath fiery darts of temptation, which only faith can quench; and therefore, whatever be the fitness and temper of that armour which the Christian has from heaven, faith must be his shield. No

[1] Ephes. iv. 22, 23, 24. [2] Tit. ii. 12.

superstitions of popery, no crosses, no relics, no holy water, can drive away the tempter; but only gracious belief in the person, love, and work of the Redeemer, experienced within the heart, overcoming temptation, and casting down the love of sin there, as Dagon fell from his place before the victorious ark of God. Faith trusts that the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head; and therefore looks to Him for deliverance from the curse, and victory over the power of sin. It hath respect unto all the commandments of God, and begs according to his will—"*Teach me the way of thy statutes, O Lord, and I shall keep it unto the end.*" "*Make me to go in the path of thy commandments, for therein do I delight.*"[1] Thus the Christian expects, as well as resolves; to do all things through Christ who strengtheneth him. And as Moses "chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season," so doth a believer bid temptation get behind him in the might of God. Clothed with the Sun of Righteousness, he would have the dark and waning moon beneath his feet. He "hath chosen that good

[1] Ps. cxix. 33. 35.

part which shall not be taken away from him ;" and hath no room in his heart, so occupied, for the indwellings of worldly love in its reigning power. That love would only darken its peace, bedim its hope, and pollute it to the purposes of sin, when it is set apart to be the temple of the living God. Faith sees iniquity, transgression, and sin, arrayed alike against the peace of God's adopted family, and the honour of their Lord, as Jehosaphat saw the children of Ammon and Moab, and Mount Seir arrayed against himself and Judah, and cries, " *O God wilt thou not judge them ; for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do ; but our eyes are upon Thee.*" [1] But then, faith, thus looking to the Almightiness of God for victory, goes forth against these enemies, and is made more than conqueror through the might of the Head and Captain of salvation. Faith carries the soul above those enemies, so dreadful, so invincible to unbelievers, the world's attraction, the world's mockery, the world's love, or the world's hatred ; and fixes it upon God. " *Thou art my portion, O Lord ; I have said, that I will keep thy*

[1] 2 Chron. xx. 12.

words. Order my steps in thy word, and so shall not any iniquity have dominion over me."[1] It enters into every obligation of life, and quickens the Christian to run the way of God's commandments with the gracious diligence of an enlarged heart; for it carries a Saviour and a Helper with it into all duties. It girds up the loins of a Christian's mind in the sustaining power of God's gracious promise to every soldier and servant of Jesus Christ, "Go in this thy might, have not I sent thee?" And it presses onward in the strife with sin, hastening through the world's temptations and delights, like Gideon's soldiers, when they followed Midian, and stayed not to drink; but took of the water in their hands, as they passed through the river, faint, perhaps, yet still pursuing.[2]

(4.) *Faith has a happy exercise in the word and sacraments of its great Object, Jesus Christ.* The sun may shine, but the eye of the blind must be opened to receive it. The harmonies of sound will in vain solicit us, if the ear be not unstopped to admit them. The light of God Himself, in the declarations of his word, and the person of Immanuel;—the sweetness of all

[1] Psalm cxix. 33. [2] Judges vii. viii.

compassionate invitations uttered by that gracious Redeemer, will be unnoticed, until the soul's eye be cleared of its scales of unbelief, to behold its beauty; and the soul's sense of spiritual hearing communicated by the hand of the great Physician, to receive his word. Faith unlocks every sense of the heart, to understand, and every affection of the heart to embrace Christ, his office, his work, his salvation, his commands, his love, in the glorious Gospel of his grace. It feels the curse of sin, and the law's condemnation, as Israel felt the bite of the serpents in the wilderness—and it looks to Jesus, as the appointed cure, in pardon, peace, righteousness, and spiritual strength. It cries unto God from the depths of conscious guilt, into which the true sayings of his word have now cast it, and thence flies to Jesus. It perceives the false ground of every godless hope give way beneath it: then, crying to the appointed Redeemer, "Lord, save me," it feels his outstretched hand, like Peter on the sea of Galilee; and knows its safety; and gladly follows its Lord unto the ship of a gracious fellowship and communion.

It was well said, that the gospel of Jesus Christ penetrated farther into Britain, than the Roman armies could ever reach; and that pure

word of his love, finds an entrance into the soul, subduing the principalities and powers of sin within it, which no arm of flesh, no carnal weapons could ever effect. Hath it found this entrance into your hearts? Hath it gained this happy triumph over them? Hath it set up the throne of Christ within them, exactly where the throne of sin and Satan had its place? Has the word been unto you a seed of spiritual life, which the Holy Ghost is still watering, through faith, unto a happy fruitfulness? Or, does that word, preached day by day, fall day by day upon the surface only of your outward sense, to be seed cast by the way side, which the devil comes and takes out of your hearts by unbelief, lest you should be saved? Are you openly opposing the gospel of the grace of God? Are you attending its ministry in a lukewarm and Laodicean spirit? Are you beholding all the mystery, and all the process, and all the sufferings, and all the pains of Redeeming love—of God in Christ Jesus, reconciling the world to Himself, with indifference; barely assenting to the glorious record of Bible truth; or snatching its promises of life and salvation to sinners with one presumptuous hand, while the other is employed, as it were,

in sinning against God, and robbing Him of his glory? Or, are you by faith applying that word to your need, your pardon, peace, justification, and progress in the divine life of sanctification? O, how shall you escape, if you neglect so great salvation?

In the sacrament of the Lord's supper, faith is the eye, the hand, the mouth of the soul, whereby it sees, receives, and feeds upon Christ. So partaken, "we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood, we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us. We are one with Christ, and Christ with us." So partaken, the holy communion seals the believer's interest in Jesus, with all its rich storehouse of hope and consolation upon his heart; and bids him use and enjoy them as his own. The King sitteth at his table, and hath fellowship with his guests; and then the spikenard of that grace which springs from the communion, giveth forth the smell thereof.[1]

Faith has also a high and precious exercise in *the mysterious Laver of Baptism*. Believing parents bring their children to God in that ordinance, resting upon the promise, "I will

[1] Song of Solomon i. 12.

be a God unto thee, and unto thy seed." And committing those dear gifts of their heavenly Father, as deposits into the hand of Christ,—looking for the pardon of sin by the Redeemer's blood—looking for every privilege of the new covenant in Christ Jesus—feeling that the infants so committed, are made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven; they trust that their Saviour's Father, and their own Father—that God their Redeemer, and God their Sanctifier, will guide these little ones in after life, by divine counsel, and then receive them unto glory. In the same spirit of gracious confidence, the Church receives them, to nurse them up for God. Oh! there is a sweetness in the sacrament of Baptism, unknown and unintelligible, except to the heart of faith, as it persuades and assures—that the infant so committed to Jesus, is buried with Him by Baptism unto death, and that like as Christ was raised from the dead, by the glory of the Father, even so shall that child walk in newness of life—that, as it has borne the image of the earthy, it shall also bear the image of the heavenly.[1] Thus doth every true hearer of

[1] Rom. vi. 4. 1 Cor. xv. 49.

the word, every spiritual communicant, and every believing offerer of a child in Baptism, and every infant, that so partakes the divinely appointed rite, receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. "Unto you is the word of this salvation sent." May He who gives it a high commission to your hearts, implant it there, and make it the power of God to your salvation!

(5.) Once more; *Faith has a proper and delightful subject for its exercise, in prayer.* "*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him: but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.*"[1] Faith and prayer mutually subserve and strengthen each other. "*Trust in the Lord at all times: pour out your heart before Him.*"[2] The Redeemer's faithfulness is pledged for the veracity of his promise, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." The grant is unlimited, the promise unincumbered. "All things are yours," is the language of God to his children; and they are called to sue out their rightful claim, in their Great Head and Surety, by the prayer of faith. "*This is the*

[1] James i. 5, 6. [2] Psalm lxii. 8.

confidence that we should have in Him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, He heareth us.[1] *And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him*"[2] Faith, in supplication, realizes the omniscience of God; his willingness to hear; his unchangeable adherence to his word; the almighty intercession of the High Priest by the throne and mercy-seat of heaven. It pleads them all,—while it pleads the utter worthlessness as well as misery of the supplicant: in order that infinite love may be glorified in shewing mercy. Then, (be the subject of the petition what it may, if made according to the mind of God,) faith looks for an answer of peace; and leaves the posture of supplication, as Hannah left the temple, when her heart was relieved, and her countenance was no more sad. The dead child on the other hand, can never inherit the patrimony; and the prayer of a lifeless infidelity, can never obtain those blessings, which are the heritage of God's living sons and daughters. Faith indeed, is the soul's inward sense and act, of which prayer is the expression: and whosoever, thus

[1] James i. 5, 6, [2] 1 John v. 15.

feeling affiance in the promised and covenanted mercies of God, shall call upon Him, shall assuredly be saved. Whatsoever his disciples shall thus ask, in the name of Jesus, He will do. Faith is the mother of prayer; and very blessed is the fruit and offspring, unto those who dwell in its happy exercise. Jesus knew, for He knew all things, that his sheep should never perish; and therefore was the heart of his mediatorial love lifted up to heaven, crying on their behalf, "Holy Father, keep them in thy name." Paul knew assuredly that the Lord would deliver him from every evil work. How joyous and how powerful then, was his impulse to prayer, and his fervour in the privileged duty of praying without ceasing! And do not such Scriptures, and such examples as these, rebuke and put to shame those who never pray; or when they kneel, never believe their own necessities, nor the fulness of God in his Son; and so can never seek the mercy-seat aright,—but utter the words of supplication with unmoved minds, and have their reward in continual barrenness of heart? And this happens, while God waits to be duly entreated; and so to open the windows of heaven, and pour them down a blessing that there should not be room

to receive it. "We ask and have not, because we ask amiss."

A dying hour awaits us all; *and doubtless that is a season wherein faith should have its vigorous exercise*, if instead of finding death to be the king of terrors, we would embrace him, as the Lord's dismission from labour unto rest. I pray you in the name of God, let it be Christ to you to live. I pray you in His name, to exercise faith on Him in all things; that when the hour of your departure cometh, you may know, in the unspeakable consolations of his love, whom you have believed; that you may commit, soul, friends, parents, children, and all dear to you, into his hands, as into the hands of your own watchful and faithful God: that you may say to those who mourn your loss, "*I die, but God will surely visit you:*" and as you close your eyes upon a wearisome and sinful world, may cry in the rich experience of faith, "*My heart and my flesh faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*" [1]

[1] Psalm lxxiii. 26.

SERMON IX.

THE PERSEVERANCE, HAPPINESS, AND TRIUMPH OF FAITH.

HEBREWS XI. 8.

BY FAITH ABRAHAM, WHEN HE WAS CALLED TO GO OUT INTO A PLACE WHICH HE SHOULD AFTER RECEIVE FOR AN INHERITANCE, OBEYED; AND HE WENT OUT, NOT KNOWING WHITHER HE WENT.

IN the attacks of earthly enemies, two circumstances unite to form the difficulty of making a successful defence. When the onset is frequently made, and from many quarters, we know not whither to turn; and when the means of resistance are not in our hands, but must be sought for at a distance, the wound is given before we can obtain them.[1] One of these difficulties besets the Christian, in his warfare against the enemies of his salvation. Their attacks are many, and made from all the various

[1] Meztrezat Sermons de la Virtu de la Foy, IV. 136.

and unsuspected lurking-places, of besetting sins. But then the wisdom and goodness of God, have most graciously facilitated his means of resistance. One piece of armour may suffice to ward off every inroad; and he has not to seek it from afar, in the hour of danger. He has it within himself; and may use it at every moment of his spiritual conflict. That mighty and effectual portion of Christian covering, is *Faith*. It is the victory that overcometh the world; the shield whereby to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked: and the Holy Ghost hath placed it, as a sure defence, before the hearts of all who "*are his workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus, unto good works.*" [1]

The supreme importance of this master grace, has induced me to make it the subject of several discourses; in order that we might see, how sure a guide, how safe a defence, how powerful a principle, to suit every possible circumstance of life, was possessed by Abram the friend of God; and not by him only, as an insulated and solitary example of divine goodness, in which no other man's experience shall ever rejoice, —but as the common and covenant property

[1] Ephes. ii. 10.

of all, who being Christ's, are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

I shall now conclude this general view of the subject by some remarks,

VI. On the Perseverance of Faith.

Profane history, both in its ancient and modern divisions, presents us with spirit-stirring examples of generals, who, having reached the land of their enemies, have burned the ships that carried them thither; in token that there was to be no retreat, and to show that there could be no safety, no hope, except in victory. The same histories inform us of nations who have left their own sterile country, to seek happier soils and climates: and being determined never to return, have taken with them all they had, and set their faces right onwards against all enemies, and all obstacles. Like their purpose, is the Christian's high resolve, when God hath called him to be a soldier, in the day of his effectual conversion. Having bucklered himself with the shield of faith, he must not remove it, while living, from his arm. Having drawn against his spiritual foes, that sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, he must no more sheathe it, until it shall be exchanged for the palm of an endless triumph. "He must

manfully fight under the banner of Christ, against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and must continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant to his life's end.' In this glorious warfare, the faith of the Saviour's followers is sustained by the might of his indwelling grace. Thus upheld, Abram went out from his home in Chaldea, at the bidding of Jehovah, a submissive and cheerful wanderer; though he knew not whither he went. Thus upheld, he did even more than this, in ready sacrifice of his own erring will to the perfect will of God. "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:" because he looked for his final settlement far beyond the walls and towers of Canaan, near to some of which his tent was pitched, even to a city which hath foundations indeed,—a city, standing upon the everlasting hills of divine and immutable purpose in his behalf, a city whose builder and maker is God.

Truly, *if he* and his family of faith *had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.* There was time enough in which to retrace their steps to Chaldea; for

more than two hundred years elapsed between the call of Abram, and the death of Jacob. There were no external difficulties of considerable moment to overcome; nor was the distance so great, but that Abram well passed over it: and in after days Jacob performed the same journey with his staff. The children of Abram by Keturah did actually go thither to dwell. But the land of idolatry and sin was never more looked back upon with desire. Nay, when Abram sent his servant thither to seek a wife among those of his kindred who remained there, it was with an expresss condition that Isaac should not go to dwell among them. "*The servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest? And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou, that thou bring not my son thither again. The Lord God of heaven which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land, He shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear*

from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again."[1]

Behold, the perseverance of a faith enkindled by the Spirit of God, within a believer's heart; burning brightly there, to shew the soul its true interests; and warming all its affections to pursue them, in simple renunciation of that unhallowed rest which it had for ever forsaken! Such a faith hath no memory for the past, save only to keep in mind the unsearchable riches of salvation, whereby the sojourner was called forth from his abode of idolatry and death. Such a faith hath a fixed and steadfast eye, that can look only right onward; and a patient will, that can stay God's appointed time, in God's appointed place, without one reigning backward desire of the heart. It is the act of the great Apostle, in the simple mindedness of his belief—"*Forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*"[1] From the moment when Esther was set apart for Ahasuerus, the time before she expected to be his bride was spent, not in repiningly looking

[1] Gen. xxiv. 5—9.

beyond the palace into which she had been taken, but in accomplishing the appointed months of her purification; that she might go to the king according to the custom of the realm. And thus do they, whom the glorious Husband of the Church calls us to his bride. They have one purpose, for which to live—that they may glorify Him in their bodies, and in their spirits, which are his: and they have one purpose, for which to die, that they may be for ever with the Lord.

Without visible right to a foot of land in Canaan, Abram continues to sojourn there. A famine drives him forth for a while into Egypt: but he returns to the place which God had commanded for his abode. The dislike and envy of the people cannot discourage him, nor make him partake their idolatries. War with the king of the land cannot terrify him thence. Tried, tempted, and childless, he still holds on his way; and hopes in God against all apparent grounds of hope: believing that God would give Canaan to his seed, when he was stricken in age, and when every day took something from the probabilities of sense, that he should ever embrace a son. Now this holy perseverance, is one of the most unequivocal features

of gracious faith in the heart of a disciple of Christ. He knows himself to be a stranger; and therefore has nothing to do but to pass with activity, diligence, and constancy, to the joys of his eternal home. He knows that he is a pilgrim and a wayfaring man; and looks forward to his rest, with undivided attention of heart. He hath parted from sin, as a friend for ever; and henceforth knows it in its reigning power no more; but holds right onward to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

Now whence hath the faith of God's elect its strength and fortitude, unto such holy perseverance? Even in the promises of God, sure, stable, and inviolable, as they all are; yea and amen in Christ Jesus, to the praise of their gracious Giver. He hath undertaken to uphold and strengthen his adopted children; to guide them with his counsel, and after that to receive them to his glory. There is a constellation of promise glowing with the light of covenant love, and steadfast, in the firmament of covenant truth, filling the eye of faith with its brightness, and leading the believer's spiritual way—(the cross being the central pole star of all the radiant host) with certainty, constancy, and peace.—"*They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion,*

which may not be removed, but standeth fast for ever."[1] "*The mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy upon thee.*" "*As for me, this is my covenant, saith Jehovah, My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put into thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth.*"[2] "*This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good: but I will put my fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from me.*"[3] These are the full, free, and stable promises of an immutable God. They form, not only, as I said, the unchanging constellation of a Christian's joy, but also the munitions of rocks, wherein the perseverance of faith is placed by an Almighty hand. They are the sure anchorage

[1] Psalm cxxv. 1. [2] Isaiah liv. 10. Isaiah lix. 21.
[3] Jer. xxxi. 32; xxxii. 40.

of his hope, as he is enabled to plead them before God; and as the Holy Spirit of promise comes to him in answered prayer, "not as a wayfaring man that tarrieth for a night," but as an inhabitant, to dwell within him, and to be the earnest of his inheritance unto the redemption of the purchased possession.

Confidence in these promises, through the abiding of the Holy Ghost, establishes the Christian in well-doing. The faith which unites him to Christ, upholds him in the way of holiness. Mercy, casting his sin into the depths of the sea, binds him to the God, whose pardon hath visited and saved him; and the more brightly the hope of salvation burns within him, the more steadfast will be his course. The hearts' bias to sin will be deeply lamented; and strife against it encouraged. The preciousness of that rest, to which the compassionating Saviour invites every weary one, will be eagerly sought. Prayer will be earnestly made through that righteous plea wherewith the mediation of the High Priest above, hath furnished every comer to the throne of grace. And thus will the followers of the Redeemer be made more than conquerors, through Him;—"*thus will they be kept by the power of God, through faith,*

unto salvation." For the communication of this persevering faith, should every Christian's heart be lifted up. Learn, upon the Apostle's ground, and in his gracious confidence, each to say, "*I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" [1] And then, let the misinterpreters of this Scripture—the glorious climax of Christian happiness on this side the grave, say what they please, you will give the calumny its best refutation, by being "*steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.*" [2]

VII. Here then is a page, whereon to make a brief record, touching THE HAPPINESS OF FAITH. And were the Book of God void of every other evidence of a believer's felicity, than that given by Isaiah, it were enough for the ground and nurture of every joy;—"*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee; because he trusteth in Thee.*" [3]

[1] Rom. viii. 38, 39. [2] 1 Cor. xv. 58. [3] Isaiah xxvi. 3.

But the *very exercise* of faith, so encouraged and upheld by the sure word of God's engagement, is a life of real and abiding happiness. How many of you, hath it placed again and again, in the brighter hours of its realization, upon a spiritual Nebo, in a clear pure atmosphere of gracious expectations and assurances; when your conversation was especially in heaven, and you were enabled to look round upon the mercies, with which you were encompassed, and the glory wherein they will be consummated! Did you not then stand upon your high place, like Balaam on that of Moab; and looking out upon your blessings and hopes, see but the uttermost part of them, and not see them all: but yet know that the invisible portion was immeasurably greater than all that could be seen and enjoyed, on this side Canaan that is above, dear and delightful as the earnest of them hath already been to your gracious experience?

The Christian can live by faith, without care for the abundance of this world's good. He has delights, in present communion with his heavenly Father, beyond all that the world can give; even if its whole surface could be changed into one Eden of delights, and the garden were

to be his own. He has the manna of a Saviour's body, and the spiritual refreshment of his blood, whereon to live: and while the world knows not the sweetness of the daily repast, the world's poorer and meaner portion is undesired. The gracious pilgrim, who seeks another country, that is a heavenly, (if he seeks it with all his heart,) will not be filled with disapointments and heart rendings, if others appear to have better accommodation than himself, by the way. He hath learned in whatever state he is, therewith to be content. True indeed it is, (and a proud stoicism utterly unworthy of Christ's Gospel, would it be to assert the contrary,) that "no affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous." But then such trials are like mineral waters, nauseous it may be to the immediate and outward taste, but healing in their effects; and therefore cheerfully taken, when wisely and fitly administered by the physician. And thus it is, and thus only, that a Christian can "*glory in tribulation: knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in his heart, by the Holy Ghost given to*

him."[1] Faith, realizing the disciple's property in his Lord,—faith, realizing membership with his Lord's mystical body, assures him of an interest in all that Jesus hath: and therefore faith may well be satisfied, and happy, and blessed, with a less measure of present comforts, than—in the sickly desire to possess them, are continually haunting and mocking the hearts of those who have their portion in this life.

Abram sought not great things for *himself* in Canaan; because greater things than those of earth's highest grandeur were his, as the friend of God, and the inheritor of a better land of promise. He sought not great things for his *children;* for God, with all his goodness was also their portion. He was therefore willing, that Isaac and Jacob should dwell with him in the same lowly tabernacles, as partakers of the same glorious promise with himself. If they who have fully embraced the gospel, would often examine their goodly heritage, they would be more happy than they can be, by dwelling, as they do continually, for themselves and those most dear to them, within the dim, impure, and cloudy circles of fears, hopes, expectances,

[1] Romans v. 3—5.

and disappointments, which their mere earthly horizon embraces. If they would walk about the Sion of salvation,—if they would tell its bulwarks, mark its towers, and their own happy propriety in them, they would see a measure of beauty and abundance in this city of God, which would amply satisfy them: as it shall satisfy, but never satiate, the glorified of God through all eternity. And though, in regard of earthly comforts, "*the fig tree should not blossom, neither should fruit be on the vines; the labour of the olive should fail, and the fields yield no meat; the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there should be no herd in the stalls: yet they would rejoice in the Lord, they would joy in the God of their salvation.*"[1] Happen what might, in personal or family experience, there would be blessing, and there would be peace. The prophet asked, "*Is it well with thee, is it well with thy husband, is it well with the child?*" And the afflicted Shunamite answered in faith's right estimate of providential dispensations, "*It is well.*"[2] Instead of being engaged in a continued and fretful quarrel with necessity, that is with the wise though secret

[1] Habak. iii. 17. [2] 2 Kings iv. 26.

will of God, which must prevail over all human opposition, the faith of his children acquiesces in it; and they are filled with peace in this gracious submission of obedience and love. If a true follower of our blessed Lord watch over his faith, it will keep his joy, even a joy unspeakable and full of glory, until he receive the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul. But I pause. The field on which I have entered, is too spacious to be fully trodden. I would gladly have walked with you a little while longer in it, were I not called away to one part more of this wide and fair domain.

VIII. THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH.

The archers of a world's trials, and of the god of this world, may sorely grieve a trusting Christian, as they shoot at him; but his bow will abide in strength, and the arms of his hands will be made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.[1] He will be able to reckon, with the sacred discrimination of Paul, "*that the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in him,*"[2] when the King of Saints shall come and gather his elect from the four

[1] Gen. xlix. 23, 24. [2] Rom. viii. 18.

corners of heaven, into the joys and felicities of his accomplished kingdom. Joseph's dungeon has light; because he looks by faith beyond it. And Jacob, though halting with the angel's touch, will not let him go; because faith is assured of the blessing. Job holds fast by God, and his faith conquers in affliction; because it hath taught him to say, "*I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.*" [1] Paul is tranquil amidst all the terrors of the storm: because he relies upon the promise that God hath given him his own life, and the lives of them that are with him in the ship. Surrounding evils are many and mighty; but faith fortifies the heart against them, and overcomes them all. It embraces the absolute truth of all God's revelation. It makes personal application of all his promises in the Mediator. It hangs on his power, fidelity, and love. It turns from all other expectances of help: and is sure of finding the supply of every need, in the fulness of God. Therefore doth it challenge every enemy, and

[1] Job xiv. 25, 26.

triumph over every hindrance. Faith sees Christ a victor in every conflict: and knowing that they who are one with Him, vanquished sin by his conquest representatively, and are instated into the certainty of a real personal overcoming, it rejoices in the issue of the battle, while the battle is yet in progress. "*I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him, against that day.*"[1] Faith hears the promise, "*When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee:*"[2] and faith, looking at the almightiness of the Promiser, and the truth of the Surety, gives its cheerful answer, "*Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; thy rod, and thy staff they comfort me.*"[3] The bow of the covenant is in the cloud: and while the rain descends, and the winds blow, and the floods beat, yet doth the Christian even then triumph, in the assurances of present safety, and of the early assuaging of the waters that surround him.

Jehoshophat had made a covenant with the

[1] 2 Tim. i. 12. [2] Isaiah xliii. 2. [3] Psa. xxiii. 4.

king of Israel; and therefore when Ahab asked him for help in the war with Ramoth Gilead, he answered, "*I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses!*"[1] And when the Most High is at peace with a man, by the blood of the cross, and the sense of that peace dwells within him, it is his privilege and his strength, and his safety, and his salvation, and the firm ground of his lofty triumph, that every thing which God hath to communicate, belongs to him, in Christ. Therefore will he not estimate his condition by present and visible standards; but by his spiritual relation to the Eternal Trinity, and to those treasures of inheritance which are made over to the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus. Therefore, as Abraham staggered not through unbelief, when the child of promise was long delayed, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God,—so a steadfast belief, upheld by the hand of the Holy Ghost, triumphs in looking, not at the things which are seen which are temporal, but at the things which are not seen which are eternal.

But the *futurities* of a believer far exceed all

[1] 1 Kings xxii. 4.

present enjoyments; and in them is the victory and triumph of his faith. He may be mean, despised, and hated by the world,—but faith shews him to himself, in the glass of the Gospel, and in the mystical body of his Lord, as a living member of his Church, arrayed with the garments of salvation; crowned with a diadem of glory; associated with the blessed community of the heirs of immortal life; and destined to bear his long-looked, long wished-for part, in celebrating the victories of the Redeemer, in that day, "*when He shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.*" And when he looks upon the enemies of his soul from this eminence, he sees them indeed fallen beneath his feet. Then can he take up his parable, with a prelate of our English Church,[1] whose experience in the divine life surpassed even the mightiness of his theological learning, and say, "O my soul, the powers of hell shall not be able to stand against thee. They are mighty, and have all advantages of a spiritual nature of long duration, of place, experience, subtlety; yet this encouraging grace of faith is able to give them

[1] Bp. Hall's Works, VI. 370.

the foil, and to trample over all the powers of darkness. O my Lord God, do thou arm and fortify my soul with a lively and steadfast faith in Thee. I shall then not fear what man or devil can do unto me. Settle my heart in a firm reliance upon Thee: and then turn me loose to what enemy Thou please."

Such are the present triumphs of the life of faith;—triumphs not to be wrested from the Christian,—triumphs that shall brighten around him, until the day when his earthly warfare being accomplished, he shall cry, "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall give me in that day.*"[1] What the eternal triumph will be, when the victorious Saviour shall call his saints to reign with Him in glory, the disciple of Christ, must be contented only darkly and dimly to anticipate. But the day will soon dawn: and then he will see them all, and know that they are all his own, in and with the glorified Head and Captain of his salvation in this holy war. Mean time let him go forward, wait, strive, pray, praise, and triumph.

[1] 2 Tim. iv. 7.

And, oh that every unbeliever, subdued by the sceptre of redeeming grace, fleeing to Jesus, from the curse and condemnation of a broken law, would be arrayed beneath his banner, and made partaker of his victory! For if these things be so, then is unbelief a dreadful state, and its portion an appointment of misery. It hath an awful character—"Without Christ, without hope, and without God in the world." "*He that believeth not the Son hath not life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.*"[1] Sodom was not more awfully endangered by its pollutions, than Capernaum by refusing Christ. Let no man therefore, in whose hand the Scriptures of salvation are providentially placed, imagine, that if he be free from the guilt of sensuality, and a lover of the order, moralities, and charities of life, but yet turns his back upon Christ, in contempt or indifference, he shall escape the judgment of God. The mere formal words of prayer from infidel lips can no more enter the ear of God, than the unbelieving Israelites could enter Canaan. Unbelief is the fountain of all sin; and the bitter waters flowing from it are unto death. As faith purifies the heart; so infidelity fills it with iniquity.

[1] John iii. 36.

As faith works by love to God; so unbelief lives in a dreadful atmosphere of hatred towards Him. It turns away from the only possibility of victory over sin, and union with Christ Jesus, without whom fallen man can do nothing. It makes a league with the enemies of God; and rejects the sinner's only Friend, in order to obtain this dreadful peace. It repels and repudiates every promise and denunciation of the word of God; and if He be not believed, then faith must be exercised in the assurances and seductions of Satan; for man can have no other object of trust and confidence, than He is who "so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, to the end that all who believe in Him should not perish, but should have eternal life:" or than that lost Spirit, whose business of unceasing malignity it is to ruin men, soul and body, for ever. Unbelief then, changes, if I may so speak, the devil into a God; a liar from the beginning into an utterer of unerring truth; and the truth of God into a lie. Is unbelief then a state, in which a man, with death, judgment, and eternity before him should abide one moment, while Christ, and all that He hath may be that man's by faith? Judge ye.

SERMON X.

ABRAM'S ENTRANCE, AND WELCOME INTO CANAAN.

GENESIS XII. 6, 7.

AND ABRAM PASSED THROUGH THE LAND UNTO THE PLACE OF SICHEM, UNTO THE PLAIN OF MOREH. AND THE CANAANITE WAS THEN IN THE LAND. AND THE LORD APPEARED UNTO ABRAM, AND SAID, UNTO THY SEED WILL I GIVE THIS LAND.

"A CHRISTIAN is one that believes things his reason cannot comprehend; hopes for things which eye hath not seen: labours for that which he knows he shall not obtain on this side the grave: yet in the issue, his belief is evidenced to be true; his hope makes him not ashamed; and his labour is not in vain."[1] Such a follower of God was Abram; and such, in an eminent degree, his paradoxical experience.

[1] Lord Bacon's Works, Vol. vii. p. 21.

Such is the experience of every spiritual descendant of Abram, in a greater or less proportion. "*His life is hid with Christ in God.*" The secret sources of his spiritual being lie deep, infinitely deep, beyond the reach of any estimate of them, which the men of this world can form. His consolations are equally far out of the sight of all carnal observation; and his whole walk seems to involve contradictions, to those who judge after the sight of the natural eye, and the hearing of the natural ear, instead of forming their opinions by the unerring rule of the Holy Volume, which teaches, that however rough and thorny the believer's path may be, he has joys which a stranger doth not intermeddle with, and that as his "*sufferings abound for Christ, his consolations also abound by Christ.*"[1] This very important truth is amply unfolded in the history of Abram. Having therefore closed for the present the digression, which it appeared necessary to make into a consideration of the mighty principle of faith, which upheld him in all difficulties, made him more than conqueror in trial, and solaced him, by the immediate presence of the Comforter in

[1] 2 Cor. i. 5.

all his afflictions,—I proceed to examine his more immediate history, as a full and unquestionably practical exhibition of the power of faith. I notice then,

I. HIS ENTRANCE INTO THE PROMISED LAND.

Ur of the Chaldees, and Haran itself were now left behind; dear as one naturally was to him, as the land of his birth and early attachments, with all that tenderness wherewith the heart dwells upon its first recollections; and fondly as he would think of the other, from being the last earthly resting place of his father Terah.[1]

He went forth, however, from both, to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan he came. But here perhaps the father of the faithful may be met in his way of God's bidding, with a sceptical objection. Where, it may be asked, was the advantage gained to Abram, even in a spiritual point of view, by leaving Chaldea, wherewith to counterbalance

[1] Jewish tradition, reluctant to admit the possible error of the national ancestor, held that Abraham had first openly declared his hostility to idols; and thus rendering himself the object of persecution, was at once led from Chaldea by the Divine Voice, and driven by the popular resentment.—Judith v. 6. Dr. Croly's Divine Providence, p. 308.

his privations, and the sacrifices which his departure would demand from himself, and from those whom he left behind? The promised land whither he went was a strong hold of idolatry; while the recollection, and some practice, of a more pure worship still existed among his kindred in Mesopotamia. (Joshua xxiv. 2.) His removal therefore was an exchange of superstition; and left the balance, on that, as well as on all other accounts, in favour of his own country. But the difference of situations was immense; and the wisdom of his covenant God was not less gracious, than unerring, in demanding this removal. Abram was *at home* in the country of his own previous idolatry, among his kindred and in his father's house. He lived in it as his element, as the place of his proper rest, the home of his heart and desires, as well as of his family. But he is *a stranger, a pilgrim, a wayfaring man* among the superstitions of Canaan, and the dishonour done by its inhabitants to the holy Jehovah. With them he had no participation, no sympathy, no communion. He passed through all those abominations, and defilements, as some rivers are feigned to pass through lakes, into which they fall, without any intermixture with the waters

around them. And what is this, except a Christian's new and gracious state, when the hour of his conversion has arrived, and he is thenceforth called in the manifestation of God's love to him in Christ, to "obey from the heart that form of doctrine which has been delivered to him?" He is still in the world; still encompassed with its dark, and foul, and flagrant idolatries; and he must needs go out of the world, before he can escape them. He must still breathe an atmosphere that teems with moral pestilence. He must still have his neighbourhood amongst men sunk in the love of present things; where hands without number are employed in raising idols of earthly worship, and hearts without number are upholding their rivalry against God in Christ Jesus, and saying unto them, "Ye are our gods."

If the Christian be indeed to separate himself in every civil transaction from the wicked; from those, who, whatever be the peculiar character of their besetting sin, do, by clinging to it, commit a dreadful unfaithfulness against the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent, and against the incomparable preciousness of his Atonement and Righteousness, then he must needs go out of the world. He can per-

form no duties, fulfil no relations, make good no obligations, out of all those, wherewith his heavenly Father hath bound him to his family, his country, and his fellow men. He must even surpass the morbid and mistaken sensibilities of those, who notified to the eyes of an unbelieving world, the corruptions of our early Christianity, by burying themselves, far from all the ordinary associations and charities of humanity, in the depths of the wilderness, and dwelt a life long of perverse abstraction in caves of the earth, or on the top of lofty pillars; often, however, less lifted up, on these pedestals, than on their own pride and self-complacency. But when a man hath learned from his effectual teacher, the Holy Ghost, "*to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord,*"[1] he hath no longer fellowship with his former idolatries. His conv ersation is no longer in the world, but in heaven. The chain of slavery, that bound him to earth and earthliness, is broken; and being risen with Christ, *he seeks those things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.*[2] The world is a believer's home, not one moment after he

[1] Rom. vi. 11. [2] Colos iii. 1.

hath been shewn the glory of his Saviour, the beauty of salvation, the holiness of Christianity, the purity of God, and the example of Christ, as the object of imitation to his Church, as well as its light and lustre. While he lay in his death of trespasses and sins, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, and whatsoever was not of the Father, but of the world, were the delights and resting places of his heart. But when faith hath led him to the cross, when faith hath brought home upon his heart the sense of union with his Redeemer, when faith hath opened the inlets of his affections, and poured a full tide of grace, the unsearchable riches of redeeming love upon them, then is the world crucified to him, and he to the world. The believing view of this Saviour makes a full, final, and eternal divorce, and that too a willing divorce, between his disciples, and the land and associations of former idolatry. He is not of the world, even as his Lord was not of the world. He walks as in an enemy's country. He is a weaned man; no longer conformed to the world, but transformed in the renewing of his mind. His outward position may be much the same as it had been before he embraced the Gospel; but how

mighty the difference, both in the secret desires, hopes, fears, conflicts, joys, and consolations of the inward man of the heart, and in the outward acts of daily life! Now he cries, as he sees the world in rebellion against its Saviour, the slave of sin, or the idolater of a legal righteousness, and equally under the wrath of God for all, "*Woe is me that I am constrained to dwell with Mesech, and to have my habitation among the tents of Kedar.*"[1] Like Abram by Sichem, or Lot in Sodom, his righteous soul is vexed: and while its holy sympathy is outpoured unto his Father, who is in heaven in behalf of the spiritual suicides around him, so desperately encouraging each other in the work of self-destruction, he flees to God for himself, shuts the door about him, in holy communion with his all-sufficient Portion, and there, and there alone, hopes to find, and as he becomes familiar with his place of rest, to experience, a peace, which the world can neither give nor take away.

Here then is the real test, here the infallible touchstone, to ascertain the nature and character of your spiritual state, not as it is before man,

[1] Psalm cxx. 5.

but as it is before Him, who knoweth the heart and trieth the reins. Your profession of attachment to Christ crucified is not intended to carry you away from the post of duty in the world; as a momentary influence of unworthy fear led Elijah to flee from Ahab and Jezebel into the wilderness, where God found and reproved him; but it is meant to separate you from all kindred and connexion with sin, with unbelief, with the spirit of a reigning earthliness. It is intended to make you exhibit the image and superscription of your heavenly King among his enemies; to shew the impress of his hand, in the beauty of holiness, wheresoever you go; that men may take knowledge of you, that you have been with Jesus. It is designed to make you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; and to testify, not merely to the existence but the victorious power of an indwelling Saviour and Holy Spirit, in stemming the tide of irreligion and ungodliness around you. Your faith calls you to stand upon the sure foundations of the word of God, like those who have tried, not only its truth, but its preciousness, as it brought you by the Holy Spirit's blessing to Christ; and upon this stable ground to exhibit the

reality of a consistent spirituality, and godliness of life; "*that men may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*" [1] If this be the stamp of your Christianity, the life of God is in it; and the life of God is within yourselves. If it be not, you may have a name to live, but you are really dead. You may have professed to leave the Chaldea of idolatry and unbelief; but you have merely changed the name of the country, while the superstitions are the same. Nay they are more dangerous, more deadly than before. The heart's utter idolatry is still cherished, and only hidden beneath the fig leaves of a Christian profession. "*The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.*"

(2.) Abram was now within the country whither he had been directed—even the country of divine promise. *But the Canaanite was still in the land.* It had belonged to Shem in the providential distributions of the earth among the sons of Noah, when the world was to be renewed; but accursed Ham had usurped it from the race of the promised seed, and though an unchangeable blessing was in it, yet was it

[1] Matt. v. 16.

filled with sinners, whose crimes were daily provoking the God of heaven. Here then was an especial trial of Abram's faith; and his circumstances are remarkably typical of those, in which every child of light must walk, until his earthly pilgrimage be well and safely passed —until "*an entrance be ministered unto him abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*" [1] The Canaanite is still in the land. That faith, which is now the law of the Christian's new and spiritual being, hath as effectually severed him from his former condition under the curse of the law, and the covenant of works, and the condemning power of sin, as the axe of the executioner separates the man, on whom it falls, from natural life. But the power of sin is not slain; the assaults of sin are not taken away; the inward pollution of the old man wars against the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness; having made an alliance with the God of this world, and with its temptations from without. His soul still must dwell among those who are enemies to its peace. He has indeed, as a believer,

[1] 2 Peter i. 11.

already entered into rest. He has the gracious repose of an intimate and mutual affection between the Saviour and himself, in that ineffable union which has been wrought by the Holy Ghost. He rests from dread of the covenant of works, from which he is now, as I said, for ever separated. He rests from the defiling reign of sin, which must no longer have dominion over him, as he is not under the law, but under grace. He rests from that dreadful cause of apprehension, which the word of God hath suspended over the head of every unbeliever. He hath free and full justification from all his sins by the blood of atonement: and therefore he hath peace with God. He is no longer under the Spirit of bondage; but if he hath graciously learned to plead his privileges in the covenant of mercy, he may come with holy boldness to the throne, in the Spirit of adoption, not as a slave, but as a son, crying Abba Father. Nevertheless, he hath not reached "*the rest that remaineth for the people of God.*"[1] He must yet expect the enmity of the inhabitants, among whom he sojourns; while he abjures all portion in their iniquities. He will know little of his

[1] Heb. iv. 3.

state and altered relation to the children of this world, if he should be disposed to marvel that they hate him. Without will be fightings against his peace; and within will be fears, from the malice of the tempter, and the peril of his snares. The sad conviction of besetting sin will often disquiet him, and break his tranquillity for a time.

But the neighbourhood of the Canaanites would raise Abram to a better and a higher hope, by shewing him that the substance of God's promise lay far beyond the land, and would keep him watchful, self-denying, abounding in prayer, and fleeing unto God for help: as those same Canaanites, in after days long served to exercise the courage of the Israelites, and hinder their swords from rusting within the scabbards, so do the onsets of temptation, and the deceitfulness of the heart, serve to exercise its graces. A broad line of separation is drawn between the renewed and better desires of a Christian's spirit, in its covenant with God, and the temper of a world, secure and delighting in its enmity against Jehovah. He dwells even in the land of promise, amidst its privileges and blessings, as one who knows that he has here only the foretaste of future happi-

ness; the full and everlasting feast being reserved till that time. when he shall enter into the joy of his Lord. To the perverted ambition of those who have their portion in this life, its poor seductions resemble the mess of pottage of profane Esau; for which, in their incontinent hunger, they are willing, ready, eager, impatient to surrender a heavenly birthright; while the Christian, faint it may be with his opposition to surrounding idolatries, will yet refuse to go to the world's cisterns. Nay, when some comfort, that seems to have more of lawfulness and purity within it than others, solicits him to partake it, a holy jealousy will often discover a snare and a stumbling block in it, and oblige him to reject it at once; as David, in his holy self-denial, would not drink of the water of the well, which was by the gate in Bethlehem, lest he should bring sin upon his soul. Thus, the very trials of the land become a portion of that universal machinery, which works together with unceasing motion, and unswerving regularity, for good, to them that love God. Thus, the world's hatred, the oppositions of inward tendencies to evil, and the multitude of invading temptations, become instruments of the Saviour's love, because they lead, as the Spirit of

God overrules them, to Him who delights to be solicited for his effectual help. If any are experiencing the stern conflict between nature and grace, dwelling in the land of a present salvation, and of promises bright with the glory of an everlasting joy and peace, they may well take comfort to themselves. The sentence of God is already denounced against the accursed Canaanite; and it shall be in good time put into execution. The enemies whom they now see, and beneath whose fiery darts they groan, being tempted, they shall see no more again for ever. Placing themselves in calm, but steadfast opposition against sin—placing themselves upon the highway of gracious duties in the might of the Spirit of God, the warfare, however stern, will soon be ended. And when they shall be joined to the company of those blessed and holy ones, who have part in the first resurrection, "*the Canaanite shall no more be among them, in the house of the Lord.*" [1]

II. I proceed to say a few words upon ABRAM'S WELCOME INTO THE LAND OF CANAAN. *The Lord appeared unto him.* Heretofore God had promised in the inviolability of

[1] Zech. xv. 21.

his truth, to *shew* the land wherein his servant must abide; but now He engages to *give* it to his seed. The day of gracious communications brightens around Abram, as he proceeds in the way of duty. And thus it will ever be. *If any man will do the will* of the Most High, *he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.* There may be hitherto only a glimmering of gracious light, a day of small things in experimental religion, apparently hardly sufficient to guide you onward. But remember, that when you go at God's bidding, and in the spirit of devoted obedience, you are journeying towards that quarter of your gracious horizon, in which the Sun of Righteousness will soon arise upon you, with healing in his wings. The promises will unfold and expand themselves in daily increasingbeauty; and fill you with enlarged joy, as they become more clearly defined to the eye, and better understood by the heart and apprehension of your faith. That word of promise, the declaration of eternal purpose, which to-day saith, "I will *shew* thee the land;" shall to-morrow speak more fully, and say plainly, "I will *give* it thee." *Your* "*path*" as ye look upwards and tread onwards, "*shall be like the shining light, which shineth*

more and more unto the perfect day.[1] God will appear unto you. The plain, the oak of Moreh, and the place of Sichem, will be verified in your experience; and like Abram, and like Jacob, you will have your Bethel, and your visions of sure, unchangeable mercy.

But in what form, it may be asked, was this manifestation of Jehovah made? Again we conceive the glorious visitant to have been the Essential WORD of God, before his Incarnation, thus rendering Himself visible to Abram's eye; coming thus, as if to compensate in some degree for the early darkness of that covenant of grace, wherein the friend of God was instated, and to be the glorious herald of its future brightness: coming thus, to shew him, a more close approximation, as it were, of mercy to him, in the person of its great Depository:—coming, that he might thus more clearly rejoice to see the day of the Son of man:—coming, as it were, to connect that gracious season of Abram's experience, with his own human advent; with his death in Abram's nature; with his resurrection in the flesh; and ascension, in that glorified body to the right hand of God, as one with

[1] Rom. iv. 18.

Abram's seed, and one with God their common Father.

'Whether, in the first instance, the angel of Jehovah visibly revealed Himself to Abraham, or whether He only spoke to him with an audible voice, we are not positively told. But the phrase in this place plainly imports, that he beheld Him with his bodily eyes. Now if Abram *beheld* Jehovah, we may be sure that what he beheld was the Word, or the Angel; for by this Being only has Jehovah ever manifested Himself. But the ordinary form, under which the Angel appeared, was that of a man. The natural presumption therefore is, that the patriarch then saw Him, under that his wonted figure.'[1]

And are not revelations essentially similar made of Himself by the Saviour to his brethren, in the conflict and tribulation of their warfare against sin? When otherwise their hearts would faint within them, does not He draw nigh, and breathe on them with the Spirit of his consolations, and say, "*Receive ye the Holy Ghost*,"[2] as your strength and comfort? Are they not welcomed into the land of promise,

[1] Faber's Horæ Mosaicæ, II. 58. [2] John xx. 22.

not merely with the voice of God rejoicing over each, "*This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found:*"[1] but in such communications of love, such supplies of spiritual strength, such an inpouring of spiritual peace and joy to their hearts, as serve to convince them, beyond the gainsaying of the infidel, that God is among them of a truth?

The Canaanites saw not the Lord when He appeared unto Abram. And if the man of God spake to them of his mercies in such a revelation, they would have probably denied his word, and scorned him for an enthusiast. But was the visit of the Eternal Word of God less real to him, because of the unbelief of Canaan? Abraham's experience and happiness testified to the contrary. Ye, to whom such high, and honourable, and gracious fellowship is a stranger, may hold it to be the mere dreaminess of the mind,; its misjudged wanderings into speculation; the unreal inhabitancy of its own creation; the fitfulness of imagination uncontrolled by the sobriety of a chastened judgment. But this is not the case. I appeal from you, as incompetent judges, to those who have gone

[1] Luke xv. 32.

forth from their idolatry at God's bidding, and as the love of Christ constrained them, when they felt its power in their heart of hearts. They will tell you, that they have thus a witness within themselves of that mysterious union with the Lord, which is the root of all holiness within them. They will testify, that from the communion which their Lord makes with them, in the infinite condescension of his grace, they are raised above temptation, and strengthened for hours of trial, and gifted with patience quietly to wait upon God, in the discharge of duties, and amidst all discouragements. They are thus in the world, as the bush in Horeb, burning with fire, but not consumed. They thus know the good-will of Him who dwelt in the bush. And when they have risen from prayer, or gone forth from the chambers of holy meditation, in which these visits of love have been vouchsafed to them, and wherein God hath lifted up the light of his countenance upon them to give them peace, their arms have been strengthened to grapple with Satan, and to wrestle with sin; their loins have been girded about with truth; their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, to run the way of all relative and social duties, in

a heavenly mind; and to live above the world. In fact, these tender communications of Himself, and his love, made by the Redeemer to his disciples, while yet in the earthly land of promise, where his undertakings in their behalf have only a beginning, though a most happy one, are the food and fuel, if I may so speak, of all experimental religion. If we would enter into its rest, Christ must be revealed unto us, in the glory of his person, and the infinite fulness and suitableness of his Almighty deliverance. Then only shall we enter into the divine freedom of the Gospel, and be willing to live supremely unto God. Come forth then, as the word of life calls, and the Holy Ghost enables you, from the land of your idolatries. And then, from the time when you once set your feet within the limits of the kingdom of God, in the full purpose of your hearts, shall you have visits of his presence, tokens of his goodness, and deep persuasions of his faithful promises in Christ Jesus, whereby you shall be led in bonds of love. You will have the dearest and the mightiest of all impulses, by which man's heart can be solicited towards that kingdom of the saints, wherein the sceptre of Immanuel shall govern a realm untroubled by a single rebel-

lious thought, and his subjects themselves, kings and priests unto God, shall enjoy their Saviour's presence without a cloud, and in that glorious union obtain the fulness of joy that is at God's right hand for evermore.

SERMON XI.

THE TENT AND THE ALTAR.

GENESIS XII. 7, 8.

THERE BUILDED HE AN ALTAR UNTO THE LORD, WHO APPEARED UNTO HIM. AND HE REMOVED FROM THENCE UNTO A MOUNTAIN ON THE EAST SIDE OF BETHEL, AND PITCHED HIS TENT, HAVING BETHEL ON THE WEST, AND HAI ON THE EAST: AND THERE BUILDED HE AN ALTAR UNTO THE LORD, AND CALLED UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD.

THE gracious and happy correspondence with heaven, enjoyed by Abram, as the friend of God, was commenced very early in his pilgrimage of faith; and continued with increasing closeness and endearment unto the end. He had no sooner entered within the land of Canaan, and seen the character of those among whom he was called to sojourn, than the Lord appeared unto him, gave him welcome thither, and promised to bestow the country upon his seed, both as a real and typical possession. That act of condescending love was immediately acknowledged by a most decided exhibition of

holy gratitude, and an ample pledge of future devotedness. There builded he an altar unto Jehovah who appeared unto him.

This spiritual reciprocity between God and the soul, forms the law and happiness of Christian life. A more important subject than that which it involves, cannot possibly be laid before our minds. If we are to look at the *tent* of Abram, as the pattern, whereby to form our own domestic arrangements, in the spirit and power of his simple faith, we must also adopt his *altar*, as the model of our family devotion. Nay, I am entirely persuaded, that where personal religion exists at all, in the reality and power of God's life-giving Spirit, there will be not only a strong desire, but a gracious determination, among those who rule in families, to acknowledge Him in social worship: even as David returned, not merely from the ordinary duties of his high station, but from the most sacred of all employments—that of bringing back the ark of God, to bless his household.[1] May that adorable Jehovah who is not only the God of the spirits of all flesh, but the God who setteth the solitary in

[1] 2 Sam. vi. 20.

families, attend us with his grace, and enable us to profit by this inspired record of his faithful servant's domestic zeal and love! I propose therefore, to direct attention to THE IMPORTANCE OF A FAMILY ALTAR, as erected to the honour and worship of Jehovah by the father of the faithful.

I. IN A GENERAL VIEW OF THE SUBJECT.

It is man's dearest privilege, as well as his highest duty, regarding himself with relation to God's revealed gospel, that he should connect all the circumstances, periods, duties, trials or enjoyments of life, with that adorable Being whose he is, and whom he ought to serve. Thus did Abram; and thereby he enhanced every providential blessing; found every affliction lightened; and dwelt habitually in heaven. This gracious association, was the golden thread that ran through every part of his conduct, and connected it in a beautiful and harmonious whole with God's will, and therefore with his own highest happiness. It was the opening act of his arrival within the borders of Canaan, and thus,

(1.) *He took the most fitting and sure possession of the promised land.* When the navigators of modern times have been providentially

directed to countries, before unvisited and unknown, it has always been their practice, to unfurl the banner of the prince who sent them forth, and for whose honour they were employed; and to take possession of the new discovery in his name and for his service. In this manner some of those places, which in times past have been, and some which yet form the most important settlements of Great Britain, have been attached to its crown, and made to form part of its empire. In some instances an act of religious worship has formed part of this ceremonial; but it is sad to think that Protestant England, has been in these respects surpassed by the followers of the Church of Rome. The earlier servants of God had a better mode of entering upon the possessions, whither his divine providence had led them, and in which his undeserved goodness had instated them. Thus, when the ark rested upon Mount Ararat, and the waters passed away from the face of the earth, Noah came forth from his refuge, at God's bidding: and the first act, whereby the gracious thankfulness of his soul had its manifestation, was to build an altar upon the soil, still wet with the waters of the deluge; to take of every clean beast, and of

every clean fowl, and to offer a burnt-offering on the altar. God's blessing followed this grateful act of a devotion, which his own Almighty grace had inspired. "*The Lord smelled a sweet savour, or a savour of rest; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; neither will I again smite any more every living thing, as I have done.*"[1] Even so did Abram. God had lately *shewn;* and now the same faithful God had *given* him Canaan. In what manner therefore doth he take seisin and possession of this heritage, made his own in the absolute freeness of mercy? He builds no lofty tower upon the plain of Moreh, whose top should reach to heaven, as did they of Babel. He takes not advantage of the mountain, whither he afterwards removed, to erect a dwelling, which might be seen far and wide to his honour. He does not enter upon his heritage, by building and occupying a house; as if that measure, were the establishment of his claim in the most befitting manner. How then doth he possess Canaan? Even before the tent is pitched—even before any accommodation is provided for himself, or those around

[1] Gen. viii. 20.

him, he builds an altar unto the Lord who had appeared unto him. God's gift to him, God's welcome, as he enters upon the gift, must both be acknowledged. So did David in after times. "*He sware unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob, Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed, I will not give sleep to mine eyes, nor slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.*"[1] It was even a heathen practice to build a temple, while the walls of the city rose around it; to connect these outward defences with the sanctuary, by cords, and so with the false deity who was supposed to inhabit it. And we can be placed in no circumstances, where the divine glory is not the first point, towards which our minds should be directed. The all-wise Prophet of the church has taught us what should lead, and what should follow in our prayers. "*Hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.*" These are the first petitions wherewith to seek the throne of grace; and then we are commanded to bring thither those

[1] Psalm cxxxii. 2—4.

which concern our own temporal and spiritual need. And why? Simply because the glory of God in Christ, as the Father of the redeemed and elect Church, is the great point of convergency to every desire of its members, when their eyes are opened to know that glory in redemption. And as those desires tend thither, they carry with them the assurance of heard and answered prayer, for every other subject, on behalf of which it can be exercised.

Abram *pitched* his tent, but *built* his altar. When it was needful to provide himself with shelter, a frail covering suffices for the pilgrim of a day, who must live as a wayfaring man. But the honour of the everlasting God demands more pains, and more stability for the place of his presence. And if it were thus indeed with ourselves; if having food, and raiment, and houses wherein to live, instead of being so anxious that they should be ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermilion, we were more fitly solicitous to raise the altar of family religion; to give our main care and effort to the glory of God; to establish his worship, not merely individually within the dwellings of our hearts, but unitedly within the walls of our habitations, there would be a high and fruitful state of pri-

vate, public, national religion among us, which now we cannot see. Our luxurious selfishness can only thus be corrected. Only thus can we escape the reproach, which should be as bitter, as it is alas, well deserved, of seeing our own spiritual barrenness in evangelical holiness and blessedness, compared with the spiritual fruitfulness of those, who served God in the earlier ages of his church, and on whom, the dew of his blessing was so abundantly poured from the fountain of the Eternal Spirit. How delightful, how happy would be the spectacle, if every mercy put into our hands by God, were regarded as a first fruit of the promises made by his free love in Christ Jesus, whether for body or soul, for ourselves or those most dear unto us; and so were sanctified by the word of God and prayer! It would indeed be well, if we and they were dedicated to Him. And if we always took possession of a new habitation, by erecting God's altar within it: we should thus link it to those designs of unchanging love, which give to the children of salvation all present dispensations, as parts of their abiding heritage in the covenant of love, sealed and made sure by the blood of Christ.

But the instances of this holy dedication are

rare among us. Who shall say, that while he has entered upon a new habitation, even after having made every provision for bodily comfort, that art could devise or his resources furnish, he hath not forgotten to bring God within his doors; to provide for his worship, and to make a solemn surrender of the whole settlement, with all hopes, desires, and anticipations attached to it; that it might be employed in promoting the honour of Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the universal Sovereign of the Church and of the world? Contrary instances are afflictingly numerous, of those who professing to worship God, professing to depend upon his providence, and to seek the salvation of his Gospel, enter upon their houses, and upon their inheritances, to lie down and to rise, to go in and out, to eat, to drink, and to be filled with abused abundance, no more recking or regarding God, who gives this plenty, than the sheep, when they go with the eagerness of mere animal instinct to their fold, or the herd, when they seek food and fodder in their stall. The ox indeed knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Jehovah, man's Lord, Maker, and Provider, man's Saviour and only Hope, hath been compelled to say to his professing

worshippers, "Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." "*They knew not that I gave them their corn and their wine, and their oil, which they prepared for Baal.*"[1] "*The tabret, the pipe and wine are in our feasts; but we regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands.*"[2] Were the altar however, erected to the worship of God, as the first and immeasurably the most needful duty of every man, when he enters upon a new habitation, and a new sphere of obligations—were the spiritual worship of Jehovah, made the first connecting act of every providential appointment with Himself and his glory, then might it be hoped, on sure and scriptural ground, that there would be a soul, if I may so speak, in the body of every temporal mercy. Every spiritual blessing, would come with an infinite addition of sweetness poured into it, by the presence and manifested love of God in Christ.

(2.) *A family altar was an important requisite in, or near the tent of Abram; because it acknowledged the great doctrine of an atonement for sin.* When Noah, as we have seen, built

[1] Hosea ii. 8. [2] Isaiah v. 12.

an altar upon the earth, which, according to divine command he was to renew, to replenish, and to possess, he offered sacrifice upon it unto the most High God. The same significant rite had been long before practised by Abel; and, almost beyond doubt, by our first parents, when the fall and ruin of mankind had been conceived and brought forth, by their rebellion against their Maker; and with it the necessity of a vicarious atonement for sin. There is no fact more notorious, upon the testimony both of profane and sacred history, than that of the notion, almost universally entertained by Jews and Heathens, before the advent of our Lord, that the displeasure of an offended God, was to be averted by the sacrifice of an animal; and that to the shedding of its blood they imputed their pardon and reconciliation. Now upon what principle is this wide spread belief—coeval with the world's history, to be explained? The practice of animal sacrifice did not obtain from reason; for no reasonable notions of God, could teach men that He could possibly delight in blood, or in the fat of slain beasts. Nor can it be said, that we have any natural instinct to gratify, in spilling the blood of an innocent creature. Nor could there be any temptation

from appetite thus to act; when the whole sacrifice was consumed by fire; or, if it was not, when men wholly abstained from flesh as their food. In fact, the destruction of innocent and useful creatures, is evidently against man's nature, his reason, and his interest. Every view we take of sacrifice, as a human appointments seems to involve us in the most serious and inextricable difficulties. Sacrifices, therefore, must have originated in an authority, of which the influence was as powerful, as the practice was universal—that is, in the authority of God, the Sovereign of the world.[1]

The sacrifice of Abel, is in itself a strong, if not an invincible argument, that the rite was instituted by the Most High Himself; and had by consequence, a typical reference to some future and nobler offering, which should be made to Him by blood. That sacrifice could not have been acceptable, save by divine appointment, according to the obvious maxim of all true religion, "In vain do they worship God, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Abel, therefore, must have worshipped God in vain, if his sacrifice of the firstlings of his flock

[1] Magee on the Atonement and Sacrifice, Vol. II. Part I. p. 28, see Hallet in Magee, p. 43.

had been either his own invention, or the command of his father Adam. But it was accepted of God, who testified of his gifts: and therefore the point is settled. Indeed, God Himself appears to have commanded Adam after the fall, to shed the blood of innocent animals, and to consume the whole, or a portion of the flesh; in token that the worshipper's sin deserved the punishment of death, even the death of an everlasting destruction to body and soul. Yet that mercy had provided a way of escape in the pure sacrifice of Him, who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, as a full, perfect, and sufficient Sacrifice, Oblation, and Satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. Abel came in faith, thus looking unto Jesus the universal Propitiation for sin, and its infinitely efficacious atonement. He sought mercy in the blood of the Lamb of God; his faith was accounted unto him for righteousness; and he had this testimony, that he pleased God. Such had been the sacrifice of Noah: for when God smelled the savour of rest, and pronounced the blessing, it was not for the blood of bulls and of goats, with which, in its abstract worthlessness, his wrath could be appeased, or his blessing obtained; but as it typified the blood

of Christ. Of the same nature was the purpose, for which Abram built his altar in so many instances:—first in the plain of Moreh, then upon the mountain near to Bethel; next in the same place, after his Egyptian sojourn; afterwards in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron; not to mention the grove, which many years later he planted in Beersheba, where he called upon the name of the Lord, the everlasting God.[1]

Abram's eyes had been already opened by faith to see something of the glorious person, and mediatorial work of that promised seed, in whom he and all nations of the earth were to blessed. That altar therefore, was not made for mere thank-offerings, or expressions of submission to providential arrangements. It had a higher, and a more blessed reference. It was

[1] 'Abram built his altars, not unto God, whom no man hath seen at any time, but unto the Lord who appeared unto him; and in all the accounts which we have of his prayers, we find they were offered up in the name of this Lord. Thus, at Beersheba, he invoked, in the name of Jehovah, the Everlasting God. (Gen. xxi. 33.) Our English translation very erroneously renders the place, "he called on the name of Jehovah:" but the original expression never signifies to call *upon* the name; but to invoke *in* the name; and seems to be used where the true worshippers of God offered their prayers in the name of the true Mediator; or where the idolators offered their prayers in the name of false deities.'—Shuckford's Connexion, I. p. 293.

meant, as the victim bled, died, and was consumed by fire upon it, to bring Abram and his family before God as sinners, righteously condemned, having no hope of escape in themselves, and no quarter of the world, and no arm of man, and no device of angel, whither they could turn with the least expectation of deliverance, from the deserved wrath of the Most High. It was meant to testify on his own behalf, and on behalf of those around him, (professors of the same worship, and followers of the same God,) that he looked to one source of help and hope; that he beheld by faith "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world:" and cast himself, and his soul, with all its sins, and all its need of mercy, upon that blood of Jesus Christ which cleanseth from all sin. Whenever a revelation was vouchsafed to him, and in every place where he sojourned, we find him building an altar to Jehovah; thus marking the importance which he constantly attached to the instituted rite, whereby the great sin-offering and atonement were prefigured. These altars exhibit Abram's persuasion of the great scriptural maxim, known and felt as containing the germ, and essence of all redemption, revealed to, and recognized by the faithful, that "*with-*

out the shedding of blood is no remission."[1] The building of an altar, was a profession of faith, the rehearsal of the patriarchal creed. The act of sacrificing, was virtually the prayer of our church, wherein we say in language, second only to that supplied by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, 'O Lord, the only begotten Son Jesus Christ, O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.'[2] In such a spirit did the patriarch Job intercede for his family. "He rose up early in the morning when the days of the feasting of his sons were gone about, and offered burnt-offerings, according to the number of them all; for Job said, "*It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.*"[3] And in this acknowledgment, consists the very first element of all true and acceptable family worship. The altar of prayer, which may be set up, without a full and unreserved confession of family, as well as individual guilt, and without a reference to the needful atonement of Christ upon the cross, in order

[1] Heb. ix. 22.
[2] Biddulph's Theology of the Patriarchs, II. p. 119.
[3] Job i. 5.

to bury the guilt, and wash away the stain of sin for ever, is not the altar of scriptural requirement. God will have no respect to it: and the offerer's soul will be defiled with the additional pollution of iniquity, even in holy things.

Superstition, may build an altar after its own form, dedicated with no more of the zeal which is according to knowledge, than the Athenians inscribed that which Paul saw "To the Unknown God,"—and superstition may make such offerings, as its own delusions have imagined fitting: but these are altars and sacrifices, not made to the Most High, for pardon through the propitiation of Christ; and therefore they are mere erections of the heart's idolatry. They are the Pharisees' proud self-worship in the temple. They are the blind and the lame, out of the flock of a complacent persuasion of self-righteousness. They are mere cold confessions of obligation to God, for bestowments of providential good. They are any thing and every thing, except the sacrifice demanded by Jehovah,—a confession of sin, an acknowledgement of the righteousness and justice of everlasting death upon the offender's body and soul, for his transgressions; and the laying of a believing, clinging, clasping hand upon the head of the victim,

who bore the tremendous burden of a world's sin upon the cross, and died for its redemption. But that altar, whose erection God will bless in every family, is the altar, where He is sought by the new and living way into the holiest through the blood of Christ. Faith cannot stir one step towards God with hope, except it first sees the sprinkled mercy-seat, and book of the law; and feels the worshipper's heart sprinkled also with the atonement of the cross.

Here then, is the mirror wherein to examine our family religion,—if indeed family religion, be not altogether a stranger to our habitations, if we are not living without God in the world. Have we learned that great and momentous doctrine of atonement, so early revealed to Abram, and so familiar to the whole gracious and happy experience of his life of faith? How do we assemble around the family altar? Merely as dependants on God's providence, or as the needy and urgent petitioners also, for the rich blessings of his pardoning grace and love? Are our hearts so subdued by the sin-convincing Spirit of God, so truly cast into the depths of conscious guilt before Him, so fully and awfully persuaded of the light in which his absolute purity, and the righteous administration of his

perfect law places sin, and those who commit it,—(that is, all men who ever lived,) as to know that we must plead for mercy, and not challenge the reward of justice, on the ground of personal obedience to the law? Or are we without this sense of guiltiness, this conviction of a sinner's rightful portion from an offended God? Do we come to Him in the way of scriptural approach; taking refuge in the atonement, and resting every hope upon the preciousness of our Lord's death and passion? Or, do we come with the solemn mockery of a worship that merely owns a God of providence, but sees Him not as an avenger of evil, and yet as laying upon his own Incarnate Son the iniquity of us all? Cain was the first infidel that built an altar, and offered upon it to the Lord; and because he offered not vicarious blood, and would not admit his need of the Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, his oblation was rejected. Similar oblations have been presented before God, in the philosophical infidelity that denies atonement; thrusts God in Christ Jesus who made it, from his own work of unimaginable love in redemption; and denies the whole doctrine of the cross, as a doctrine of ignorant superstition. When we build the altar, whether in our

personal or family religion, we must take that one simple, massive, unhewn stone,—the tried and sure Corner-stone, already laid by Jehovah in the Zion of his Church,—"*God purchasing the Church with his own blood.*" We must begin, continue, and end every approach to the mercy-seat with his propitiation. We must bring that purchase-price, with all its unimaginable merit before the throne of God; and we shall find it to be indeed the royal seat of tenderness and love. We have then, an open door to the Father's heart and the Father's grace. While sin remains upon our souls, we can make no acceptable approach to a holy God, whether in individual or family worship. Jesus Christ came to take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Go we then, and lay our transgressions upon Him. Then may we use the altar as an altar of incense in prayer. Then may we use it for our thank-offering of gladness, as reconciled unto God by the expiation of his Son; prepared to ask in filial assurance of hope, according to his will; and knowing that He will hear us, answer us, and bless us, among that great and happy congregation of his saints, "*who shall have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*"[1]

[1] Revelations vii. 14.

SERMON XII.

THE IMMEDIATE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY RELIGION.

GENESIS XII. 7, 8.

THERE BUILDED HE AN ALTAR UNTO THE LORD, WHO APPEARED UNTO HIM. AND HE REMOVED FROM THENCE UNTO A MOUNTAIN ON THE EAST OF BETHEL, AND PITCHED HIS TENT, HAVING BETHEL ON THE WEST, AND HAI ON THE EAST; AND THERE HE BUILDED AN ALTAR UNTO THE LORD, AND CALLED UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD.

IT is not only one of the many, but one of the most dangerous methods, in which the spirit of darkness and delusion, brought by original sin upon the mind, works against the salvation of men, that it will allow them to admit a general rule of conduct, in the length and breadth of its requirement, but yet to produce reasons, why it may be transgressed in the objector's peculiar circumstances, or so modified and diluted in the obedience, as to become a mere

dead letter, and mockery of the living reality. Now, as we partake the common lot of a fallen humanity, so we are not exempted from the common delusion. Its very extent and peril, are however reasons, why the spiritual watchmen of our Zion, as they take their rounds over her battlements, and ascend their towers of affectionately jealous observation, to examine where the enemy of the city of God makes his most fierce or most subtle onsets, should put the inhabitants upon their guard, awaken the slumberers to watch and pray, lest they enter into temptation; and bid those who have a name to live, while they are dead, arise and call upon their God for mercy. It must not therefore suffice, to have shewn something generally of the momentous character of that awfully neglected duty of *family worship;* and there to break off, as though the bare mention of it were enough. Some persons may admit the truth of the preceding remarks. There may be a voice awakened within some heart to say concerning what has been already stated, "*The word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.*"[1] And yet such an individual may be turning round

[1] 1 Kings xvii. 24.

upon that secret pleader, and adding, as some fancied hindrance presents itself to his mind, "*Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*"[1] I proceed then to notice,

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF A FAMILY ALTAR TO THOSE WITHIN THE TENT.

Amidst the many considerations that press upon the mind, as soon as the all-important subject is brought before it, our difficulty must be, not to embrace the overpowering whole; but to select a very few of the most simple and obvious, lay them before you, and pray that God's Almighty Spirit may write them in power upon your hearts. It may therefore be observed,

(1.) *That the duty of family worship is a necessary deduction from the very first obligations of personal religion.* So long as a man is contented to live, as though there were no reward for the righteous, no God that judgeth in the earth; so long as he loves darkness rather than light, unbelief than the faith that brings salvation, with its glorious author to the heart: so long as a man is both supplicant and idol,

[1] Acts xxiv. 25.

worshipper and deity to himself, it would be a mere and absolute contradiction to expect, that his mind should open to the claims of family religion. Such an interest would involve as great a moral contradiction, as it would be a contradiction of natural laws, that a stone thrown into the water, should make the remote circles strong and well-defined, while there was no vibration of the surface in immediate contact with itself. But when the Holy Ghost hath touched the man,—when he has learned the misery of sin, and the preciousness of a Saviour,—when salvation in Christ hath been revealed to him, and he knows that he is not his own, but bought with a price, and must therefore glorify God in his body, and in his spirit which are God's, the obligations of *relative* as well as *personal* religion must be bound strongly and abidingly around his heart. Then he can hardly remain ignorant that he is concerned with God, concerned with his Redeemer, concerned with the Holy Ghost, in every circumstance and duty of life, social as well as personal: and that the word of God, which he has taken for the lamp to his feet, and the lantern to his paths, instead of the miserable and conventional code of the world's

morality, has rules for every relation, and connects him, with all his family associations, to the awful responsibilities of eternal judgment, on their behalf, as well as on his own.

If indeed it were possible that men should live in a state of the most absolute independence, one of another, like the beasts of the field and forest, then each individual, having no sympathies with those around him, would owe them no observance of duty and love. But as the God of providence hath united his creatures together in families, every member of a household is the link, as it were, of an electric chain: and the subtle current of godliness or ungodliness that flows along it, must have an influence upon all. "*Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.*"[1] How then is it possible, that when the Most High is revealed within the heart, as a God of grace, speaking peace to it by the blood of Christ, and shewing, by the Spirit's operation, the necessity of each individual working out his salvation with fear and trembling, it should not be considered a sacred duty, to teach the same gracious necessity to others, bound to that

[1] 1 Cor. xii. 26.

converted soul, by the dearest and strongest of all human obligations and sympathies? When Moses had steadfastly set his face towards Canaan, he said to his father in law Hobab, "*We are journeying towards the place, of which the Lord hath said, I will give it you; Come thou with us, and we will do thee good.*"[1] When Jacob was commanded to go unto Bethel, and build there an altar unto God, who had appeared unto him, he said unto his household, and to all that were with him, "*Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments; and let us arise and go to Bethel, and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress; and was with me in the way which I went.*"[2] When the Holy Ghost overruled the heart of Andrew to follow his Lord, as a true disciple, he first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, "*We have found the Christ.*"[3] This also did Philip, when he had been called of Jesus, act towards Nathanael. A personal reception of the truth of God unto salvation, and a heart so insensible to the claims of family obligation, as to neglect

[1] Numb. x. 29. [2] Gen. xxxv. 2, 3. [3] John i. 41.

the erection of an altar for family worship, appear to be irreconcileable contradictions.

It will not surely be said, that public worship has made such a provision unnecessary; and that the religious instruction of a family is needless. Sufficient it never can be, in the very nature of things. The ordinances of God's house can never, (humanly speaking) reach the young, until their minds are informed, in some degree, concerning the nature and infinite importance of spiritual truth. If all communication of the human understanding with the Bible and the God of the Bible be thus cut off, within the walls of our houses;—if prayer be never made within them, who can expect, (even if it were possible to suppose that the sinners in this case should desire it,) that hearing the word, or public supplication at church, should be made profitable to them? Parental instruction in the things of God, being moreover, a duty of the law of nature, arising out of a revelation of God, and of man's relation to Him, as the Sovereign of the world, could not have been set aside by the appointments of any stated and official teachers, living beyond the limits of the respective families, and sacrificing beyond the offerings upon such domestic altars. "*These*

words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."[1] The very fact, that God has instituted family relations, and at the same time expressed his will that religion should be continued in the world, has, by linking these two acts of his providence and mind together, given a proof unquestionable of the absolute duty of family religion. The knowledge of the true God, and of Jesus Christ whom He would send in the fulness of time, was to be preserved in Abram's family. In him, and in his seed were all nations of the earth to be blessed. How then was that blessedness to be communicated? How was that most gracious and glorious revelation to be preserved, except Abram should keep it alive by family instruction and worship? Did he then go forth from Chaldea alone? No: he took his household with him. Did he leave them in ignorance, to perish in unbelief of the future Lamb of God, who should take away the sins of the world? No. Did he leave Jehovah

[1] Deut. vi. 6—8.

to work a constant miracle for the preservation of that blessed truth whereof he had been made the depository, while his own family might be the means of handing it down to their posterity, and so onward, until the consolation should be manifested in human flesh? No. Did he leave the dwellers in his tent to have a godless communion with the idolaters of Canaan; while he only remained to bear a sad, and probably a fruitless testimony against their abominations? No. What then did he? He led his family to the family altar. And I am utterly unable to see upon what ground an objector can stand, who would assert, that Abram's duty was not our duty; and that its blessing will not be our own. I know not how the inference is to be avoided, that God has appointed families to be nurseries of holiness; and therefore, that family religion is an obligation, as imperative as the personal service due to Him from every one who expresses a hope of redemption from sin, and of his mercy unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ.

In addition to these considerations, there are daily cares, occasions, and necessities. There are family sins to be bewailed; family errors to be reformed; family mercies to be acknow-

ledged; family wants to be supplied; family undertakings to be blessed; family afflictions to be sanctified; family dangers to be prevented. Is God obliged, by any necessity, under which we have laid Him, to make provision for these, and for much more than these? Or must that provision come from the fulness of his grace in Christ Jesus; and should it not be sought in family prayer? How is it that the God of this world so blinds the eyes of men, as to lead them to expect, that any blessing should rest upon their families, when the eternal fountain, whence all blessings flow, (bearing with them, unless our very blessings are to be cursed, the tincture of the cross) is forgotten and defiled? Is it not, moreover, amazing, that men should own the duty of public religion; and yet continue without God in the intercourse of the family? Is it not a strange—bear with me if I ask—is it not a monstrous contradiction, to acknowledge that *different* families should assemble in the house of prayer, to honour God; and yet that members of the *same* family should never draw around its head, that he may lead, and that they follow into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, at their own home? If the heathen had their household gods, for whom

they provided honourable places in their dwellings; if Laban and Micah had their idols and teraphim, shall there be no shrine in a professing Christian's tent, as well as in his heart, for that glorious and invisible God, who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth?

Let it never be said, that these instances of idolatry cannot be brought to bear upon us. What is idolatry, except perversion of religion? And doth not this very perversion imply the truth, and therefore the obligations of a religion, which hath the infinitely wise God for its author, and his glory in Christ Jesus for its end? If God therefore hath revealed Himself to us in his word, and we refuse Him the honour of family worship, which yet dark and foul idolatry pays him under some of its absurd or tremendous mistakes, shall not these miserable heathens rise up to condemn us? "*Woe unto thee Chorazin! woe unto thee Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they would a great while ago have repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.*"[1]

(2.) Again, *the importance of the family altar is testified by that new and better law of*

[1] Luke x. 13.

intercourse, which it establishes among those within the tent.

Formerly, Abram and his family had been partakers with the idolaters of Chaldea; and all their relations to each other had been formed and conducted upon principles, very considerably, if not mainly, idolatrous. Now however, a complete change had been demanded, and wrought. The very erection of the altar was a sentence of divorce, read between Abram's family and the surrounding superstitions, with all their dishonourable tendencies against the glory of Jehovah. The patriarch, his dependents, his friends, his relatives, had been thus, in outward act at least, removed out of their sphere of darkness, and made to revolve around the Sun of righteousness, the central Light of everlasting life. The idolatries that defiled all the land of Canaan, were now only as a pressure from without, serving, as the riches of Almighty grace overruled them, to bring those within the tent nearer to each other, in the true faith of salvation, and nearer to each other in the love of God. Jacob, as I have already observed, no sooner resolved to erect the altar at Bethel, as the God of Bethel had bidden him, than he put away the false gods, and

buried them under the oak by Shechem; that there might be no member of his family, whose heart should be turned away from the Lord God, by having them before his eyes.

There was an appointment among the Jews and proselytes, that every family, province, and city, should observe the feast of Purim, as a memorial of deliverance from Haman's conspiracy. In like manner should Christian families, celebrate the great and mighty work of deliverance from the terrors of the everlasting death. And when such celebration is daily made, in a household approach to his altar, by the indwellers of the tent, as restored sinners, saved from the curse, and brought into the family of God, the new and happy relation is acknowledged, and all its depths of mercy sought, in this endearing freedom of children pleading with their Father who is in heaven.

When the altar is raised in singleness and simplicity of heart before God, the household where it stands, is placed in godly opposition to the surrounding current of sin. And while it is sweeping others away into whirlpools of transgression and unbelief, where they may be engulphed for ever, the worshippers at that altar have an anchor of the soul both sure and

steadfast. Family religion dedicates every house, not to the god of this world, but to the God of heaven. It inscribes every vessel, the large and the small alike, with that expressive motto "*Holiness to the Lord;*" instead of that which each had previously borne—"*A vessel of wrath.*" It changes the name of that tent, from Bethaven, the house of vanity: to be Bethel, the house of God. It makes the Christian father and mother, snatch their children from the fire, into which they once had the heart to cast them, as sacrifices, of all others the most unnatural, to the Moloch of this world's sinful pleasures. It gives them in full surrender to Him who bought them with his life upon the cross, and who still cries "*Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not.*"[1] It exercises a wonderful and happy alteration upon all the relations of domestic life; upon all the charities and duties that arise out of them; and connects them all with God, in outward profession; even before converting mercy shall have effected the alteration from a manifestly godless, to a spiritually praying family. It places them, not only in the eye of God, but

[1] Matt. x. 14.

in the eye of each other, as beings gifted with a reversion of immortal life, as fellows in sin, and in God's condemnation, all equally needing the laver of that fountain which hath been opened for sin and for uncleanness. It obliges them to regard each other, as embarked on the same voyage, not merely for a little time, but for all eternity. And the Scriptures, read, explained, and pressed upon their hearts, point them, as they were pointed before, to God, as the common Father of all his adopted children; to the Prince of Peace, as their reconciliation;—to Him and his fulness, as their portion; to his service, as their freedom; and to his everlasting kingdom, as their final and glorious home.

Until the altar be erected, and praise and prayer offered in the family, there can be no efficient check upon family sin; and upon the sins of individuals who compose the indwellers of the tent. Human authority can never exert a mightiness capable of reining in the headstrong course of family iniquity. God, his law, his redemption, and the constraining love of Christ, must be the "cords of a man, and the bands of love," whereby relatives, children, and servants must be withheld from forsaking the guide of their youth and the covenant of their

God, and from wandering in the ways of the destroyer. Such wanderers alas, there have been, in families where the God of salvation was owned and sought; and many sighs, and many tears, and much broken heartedness, and earnest wrestlings with God for the visitations of his converting grace to the offenders, have they wrung from mourning and almost disconsolate parents. But, if divine sanctions fail of success, it is merely the dreaming of unbelief and ungodliness to expect that human precaution, authority, solicitation, will avail to stay the headlong course of such rebels against the majesty of God, and the sanctities of family love.

Consider also, the different aspect which the house of God would bear, if all the families who visit it, came from the family altar to that of public incense. It would be contemplating a bright and happy picture, full of light and loveliness, to see a church assembly, composed of individuals, issuing from their chambers every morning, to worship God in their domestic fear and love of his holy name—each bringing from his closet to family prayer a heart fitted and prepared by divine love, to share it and enjoy it. They would betake themselves

to the house of public solemnities bearing the impress of communion with heaven; as the face of Moses shone with light, when he came down from conversing with God in the mount. They would carry the love of the Saviour with them into church; and hearts much enlarged by the spirit of grace and supplication, to seek and obtain all the blessings which He waits in the sanctuary to bestow. Then would the places of our solemn assemblies be indeed houses of prayer; and God, even our own God would bless us. As the case now stands, we come into the sanctuary with little feeling that God is there: because if we have sought Him at all in the closet, we have not in very many instances, it is to be feared, sought Him in our families, nor prayed there, that the Holy Ghost would attend us to church; and that God would satisfy us with the goodness of his house, even of his holy temple. Let me beseech you therefore, in the name of our families, in the name of our common Lord, in the name of his house, (which, were we praying families would be a house of supplication, and therefore a house of praise for heard and answered prayer) to consider what I say; and may God the Holy Ghost, give you a right judgment to act accordingly!

(3) I can now only glance very slightly, at *The Importance of Abram's family Altar, with reference to the blessing of God, upon himself and his household, as a community of believers.* His wife was a distinguished partaker of his faith in the Son of God; so were Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; and the Church of the Redeemed was embraced within the circle of his descendants for nineteen hundred years. When Sodom and Gomorrah were to be destroyed, the Lord opened his purpose to the father of the faithful; thus giving him an opportunity of pleading for those guilty cities. And why? "*I know him,*" said Jehovah, "*that he will command his children and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him.*"[1] It is well pleasing in the sight of God that masters and parents should walk in the steps of Abram; and He delights to pour blessings upon them in rich effusion, when they thus imitate the father of the faithful. The holy education of your families will be a fitting discovery of your love

[1] Gen. xviii. 19.

to God; and He will joy and rest in the acts of his love to you. If ye will seek the spiritual good of your households, and the glory of the God of their salvation, in bringing them instrumentally to the experience of his saving love, you and yours shall feel the emphasis of that gracious promise—"*They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble: for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.*"[1] I do not mean to affirm that God doth in all instances make the dew of that Spirit to rest upon every individual within the tent where a family altar is erected. This would suppose Him tied and bound to houses, as heathens chained their idols; or as Eli's sons dared to imagine, that the God of the ark necessarily attended the ark of God. But such is the usual process of his love; and such the delightful encouragement of his promise. "*The Lord will bless the house of Israel, he will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless them that fear the Lord, both small and great.*"[2] And surely they look abroad with little attention, who fail to see, that He does really diffuse the riches of his love, where an altar is raised to his honour:

[1] Isaiah lxv. 23. [2] Psalm cxv. 12, 13.

just as, while the ark abode in the house of Obed-edom, "*the Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that he had.*"[1]

"Every creature is good, if it be sanctified by the word of God and prayer:" and this mark put upon all our domestic plans and procedures is the mark of God, which He will never fail to acknowledge. While the Jews failed to own Him, and pay their vowed and bounden duty in the temple, all their wealth was put into a bag with holes. They went to the corn floor for twenty measures, but there came forth only ten; and to the wine press to draw out fifty vessels, and there were only twenty. But when once they began to build the ruined house of Jehovah, the promise was put into act,—"*From this day will I bless you.*"[2] It is even thus in the family. While God's house is suffered to be in the dust, and we think not of Him, his salvation, his righteous claim upon our family devotedness, nor of our dependence upon Him; while indeed He is forgotten and despised, must there not be the canker, and the caterpillar, the palmer worm, and the locust of divine displeasure, even in

[1] 1 Chron. xiii. 14. [2] Haggai ii. 19.

our temporal expectations, as well as that leanness of soul which his curse conveys, and which starves it, in the midst of overflowing bounties and prosperities? "*Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.*"[1] Abram's tent had the altar, and therefore it was a Goshen of light and peace; while Canaan around him, whatever might be its natural fertility, as a land flowing with milk and honey, was in spiritual darkness, even darkness that might be felt; and in spiritual barrenness, that brought forth only thorns and briars of idolatrous superstition. So will it ever be in the tabernacles of the righteous and the wicked. The voice of joy and salvation will be in the one; while all that can speak true peace and happiness to the heart will be silent in the other.

I shall not indeed be slow to grant, that misfortunes assail, not merely unbelieving households, but also those families where God in Christ is sought as a portion, listened to as a preacher, rested on as an atonement, and obeyed with holy and delightful love, as a Sovereign. I know that it is often thus. But shall I

[1] Psalm cxxvii. 1.

admit this, as a reason why He doth not bless those households that long for, and live upon his grace? This be far from me, as from one whose office it is to vindicate the ways of God to man. Unless indeed it can be shown me, that the burdens of Israel were as bitter as the plagues of Egypt; unless it be proved, (as infidelity may be defied to prove,) that God's chastenings to his children, are as dreadful as his judgments upon the wicked; I will never believe—and not believing, God forbid that I should encourage others to think so unworthily, of Him who is the covenant God of every spiritually praying family, that He does not put a decided difference between those who call upon his name, and glory in his service, and turn away such as in their miserable unbelief, from the obligations of family worship, and condemn not only themselves, but those whose best interests should be bound around their hearts, to the multiplied evils of alienation from God and his salvation. The saint and the sinner, may have the same ingredients to outward sense, wrung into the cup of each; but the difference is immense. The one hath his portion in love, the other in wrath: the Red Sea, the waves of which were the same, did

offices vastly different for Israel and Egypt. It formed a way for Jehovah's ransomed to pass over, and it overwhelmed his enemies in a destruction, from which there was no escape.

The family of Abram was secure from all attempts or devices of the idolatrous Canaanites; for the altar of God was among them; and from its horns, not all the might and enmity of the land could drag them. While the tribes of Israel went to their worship in the holy city at the appointed feasts, Jehovah drew a wall, as of fire, around the land; and no enemy was ever known to cross its borders. It will be ever thus in those families where the Redeemer is loved, honoured, and served by its members, not only as individuals, but as households. Their enemies, and Satan the chief of all their foes, may go round the battlements seeking entrance, to devour and to destroy; but the mountain on which they stand, the mountain on which their houses stand, the everlasting hill of divine love, is full round about, and shining, (as the eye of faith's assurance can discover,) with horses and chariots of fire from the Lord, their shelter and defence.

I close this subject for the present, with one word of remembrance. In the very place, even

in Bethel, where, probably, Abram built his altar, or at least very near to it, God afterwards appeared to Jacob in his hour of sorrow and temporal destitution. There did Jehovah renew the covenant with this saint of his church; there cheer his soul; and there promise never to leave him, never to forsake him. Bear this gracious history upon your hearts, ye who are anxious that your houses should be among those where the name of the Lord is invoked. Your family altar may be a blessing, an unspeakable, an inconceivable blessing to your children's children, when your bones are mingled with the clods of the valley. As Jacob, speaking of God, calls Him *The fear of his father Isaac*, so may those who shall come forth from your loins, rise up to call your memory blessed; and looking to the Eternal Three, to the saving knowledge of whom, in Christ, you may have instrumentally led them, may say, "*He is my God, and I will prepare Him a habitation; my Father's God, and I will exalt Him.*"[1]

[1] Exod. xv. 2.

SERMON XIII.

THE MORE REMOTE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY RELIGION.

GENESIS XII. 7, 8.

THERE BUILDED HE AN ALTAR UNTO THE LORD, WHO APPEARED UNTO HIM. AND HE REMOVED FROM THENCE UNTO A MOUNTAIN ON THE EAST OF BETHEL, AND PITCHED HIS TENT, HAVING BETHEL ON THE WEST, AND HAI'ON THE EAST; AND THERE HE BUILDED AN ALTAR UNTO THE LORD, AND CALLED UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD.

WHEN a country is overspread by enemies, who have taken possession of the greater portion of its surface, and are doing it mischief at their pleasure, those fortresses and strong holds which still resist, are peculiarly important. They not only protect the brave and loyal men whom their walls contain, but serve also as refuges and rallying points to those who would escape the common bondage, and make war against their enemy, under the banner of their lawful sovereign. Such a castle is every holy

example, in the midst of that spiritual tyranny, with which Satan has subdued the world. The Christian lives at peace in the high tower of his salvation, Jesus Christ. "*When the enemy cometh in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a standard against him,*[1] for the protection of holy believers; and they are as cities set on a hill, which cannot be hid, to discover, whither all may flee, and where all may be happy in the same Almighty refuge. It was thus with Abram, in the land of Canaan. The altar, which was to him as the Shekinah of the God of the altar, was the defence of his tent, and of those whom it contained. That altar served, moreover, as a beacon in the midst of the dark and destructive sea of idolatry, which had overflowed the country of promise. If the power of divine grace should influence any of the people to flee from wrath, and join the people of the God of Abram, the altar directed them whither to go, and what to do. Nor can it be known, until the world's whole history shall be fully disclosed, in the awful valley of final and unchangeable decision, how many idolaters in Canaan were saved from the wrath to come, by the influence of Abram's altar, and

[1] Isaiah lix. 19.

the blessing of God upon it, as the instrument employed for their conversion. We have seen something of its value to those *within* the tent. I would now conclude the subject by noticing,

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY RELIGION IN REFERENCE TO THOSE WITHOUT THE TENT.

I am anxious to declare what every day's experience impresses more deeply and vividly upon my mind, that any religion, whereby God is to be honoured must be *an inflexible profession*. The Saviour's faith is disgraced, and men's souls are terribly endangered, when we would attempt to allure them (as it is said) into godliness, by bringing the pure and heavenly gospel of Jesus Christ as near as possible to the world, and casting a gaudy dress of earthliness over the severe simplicity of its form; thereby thinking to make it more attractive. The worshippers of earth, and time, and sense, whose carnal minds are enmity with God, are thus allowed either to believe, that they may have discipleship with Jesus, and yet not undergo that entire conversion of heart, of which his unchanging word declares the necessity; or else, that religion itself is a mere name, instead of the most solemn and sacred of all realities. But our Redeemer's disciples are not of the world,

even as He is not of the world. And therefore, if you profess the faith of Christ crucified, it must be seen by your firm stand upon the ground of spiritual religion, that they who would partake your salvation must deny themselves, and take up the cross, and follow Jesus. Never attempt to disguise the cross. For if you do, He, in the diadem of whose mediatorial honour, that cross is the highest jewel, will confound the attempt, and say to you, in some well-merited and stern rebuke, as He said to Peter, who would have dissuaded Him from suffering for the world's redemption. "*Get thee behind me Satan; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*"[1] It is utterly impossible, that you should ever be too anxious to save the lost and dying souls around you, plucking them as brands out of the fire. But if you are to prosper in the attempt; never conceal nor compromise by your own conduct, the requirements of the gospel: never omit your bounden duties God-ward, in compliment to the world's prejudices. It is only by a bold unswerving confession and worship of God, in all times, all circumstances, and all companies, that you can

[1] Matt. xvi. 23.

expect those whom his Spirit calls to life eternal, to give Him honour on your behalf, when they have learned his preciousness. Thus only, will their lives exhibit that steadfastness of faith which has its foundation on the Rock of ages, as displayed by you, when they behold your good conversation in Christ. It is a wretched sight, over which to mourn indeed, when professors of the gospel, unwilling, as they say, to terrify others from embracing its salvation, omit their duties, or perform them in a careless manner, before worldly persons; largely exhibiting the tone of worldliness, as if they were ashamed of God; and then, think they have done Him service by the lukewarmness. This conduct is the mere cloke of their own worldliness—it is the insincere correspondence of their own hearts, with the enemies of God in that land which they profess to have forsaken; and his blessing can never be expected in the hypocrisy.

From these remarks two particulars arise, intimately connected with my subject, which I pray God to bless, as we consider them.

(1.) *That family worship is a duty, which a Christian owes to God, that thereby he may do honour to his heavenly Father, in the sight of the world.*

In his relative position, I hardly know a more important light, in which a disciple of the Lord should regard himself, than as called upon to bear a constant testimony for his divine Master; as that Saviour witnessed a good confession for him, and for the whole Church, at the bar of Pilate, although He knew the death that awaited Him, for the testimony. Among Christ's glorious titles, it is not the least distinction, to be "The Amen, the Faithful and True Witness," to testify the nature, truths, and holy purposes of his Father, his Spirit, Himself, and the common salvation which they had provided for man, in his obedience and death. Neither will it be the least blessedness of his brethren, in that great day, when He shall receive them to Himself, and place them upon his high and glorious throne, that they have confessed Him in the midst of an adulterous and sinful generation. Ye then, who would indeed follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, through evil report and good report, never rise from your beds, without remembering that He expects you to be his witnesses through the day; in order that men may take knowledge of you, not only that you have been with Jesus, but of the high and holy character of that com-

munion which you enjoy with Him. Thus answer the question, Who is on the Lord's side? Thus "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Now the family altar is one of the most plain and unequivocal witnesses to be exhibited by a believer that he serves the Lord Christ, and has consecrated not only his individual self, body, soul, and spirit, but his household, his family, all his concerns, and all his relations in life, to the high and sacred obligations of that gracious calling.

When the children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, returned to the land of their allotted possession in Gilead, they built there an altar by Jordan, a great altar to see to.[1] The children of Israel, jealous lest this act should be one of departure from the true faith, sent Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, and with him ten princes, to remonstrate against what appeared an apostacy from the God of Israel. They also prepared war against them for the delinquency. But the suspected tribes fully justified themselves, de-

[1] See Joshua xxii. 10.

claring that the altar was set up as a testimony of their relation to, and worship of the same Jehovah, with their brethren on the other side of the river. Therefore they called the altar ED; because it was a witness between both parties, that Jehovah was the common and only God.

Now this is the Christian's duty. It is his obligation to have an altar in his house, to show that he and his family have, and desire to have, gracious communion with those families who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; and that they are all one in Him. But then that altar must serve a double purpose, like the altar in Gilead. It must be both as a testimony of unity in the faith with the Church of Christ, and also as a pledge that they who worship at it, have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, with the infidelity, the covetousness, the profaneness, the cold and cheerless latitudinarianism around them. The tent must have its inscription to the Lord's honour plainly recognizable by those without. "*This is the House of God;*" as well as that which is written by the finger of the Spirit, upon the hearts, and souls, and practices, of the family within. If Abram had not built his altar, the Canaan-

ites might have been more friendly disposed towards him; but the God of his mercies would have been provoked. And therefore, although he dwelt alone, he did not hesitate thus to cleave to, and acknowledge the Saviour, in whom he had been graciously taught to trust. Elijah was alone upon Mount Carmel, while the prophets of Baal were four hundred and fifty men; yet did he not scruple to stand by the Lord's altar, and had a blessing from heaven upon his bold testimony for the truth of God, against the idolatries of Israel. When the Saviour took our nature for its salvation, and with it a conflict against the powers of darkness, He was alone; yet He desisted not from his work; and in his glorious victory have all the members of his mystical body gained an everlasting triumph. Even so should it be with his disciples. They may be alone in their neighbourhood, as worshipping families; but He will be with them, and the Father will be with them, and the Holy Ghost will be with them, and the whole glorious Three will confess them before men. What then should be the Christian's declaration, as he turns him amidst the scoffings, (it may be,) of surrounding irreligion, to worship God in his family altar, in

gracious approach by the new and living way into the Holiest? "*All people will walk, every one in the name of his God; and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.*"[1] What should be his resolve, whether under the silent contempt, or the rampant scorn of an ungodly world? "*Choose ye this day whom ye will serve; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*"[2] "*Daniel,*" in heathen Babylon, "*went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled down on his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God,*"[3] as he did before the decree was passed, which made this act of his religion a sentence of death against himself. This acknowledgment of God could hardly have been secret and closet prayer; but rather the worship of his family in the sight of those who sought his life, and whose malice he feared not; because his heart was occupied with a gracious reverence for the God of his mercies, and the only hope of his salvation.

Wheresoever the duty of family religion is neglected, there is an unacknowledged, but not on that account, a less terrible position, occu-

[1] Micah iv. 5. [2] Jos. xxiv. 15. [3] Dan. vi. 10.

pied by the neglecter, for propagating irreligion to future generations. Your descendants, who thus offend, may and will plead your example, and quote it as the miserable defence of their own family atheism. *Where* the tide of infidelity and sin, thus set free by you, may be staid; or *whither* it may bear those for whom you ought to watch, who shall say? Jeroboam made Israel to sin, many generations after he was gone to his own place.

The building of the glorious temple on Mount Sion, went quickly forward; because the stones were quarried, squared, polished, and fitted in the mountains; and the cedars were felled, sawed, and prepared upon the heights of Lebanon. Both were thus ready to be laid in their places, when brought to Jerusalem, and men wondered at the progress; for there was no sound of saw nor hammer, as the building rose in its majesty and beauty. It would be so to the honour of God, in the edification of that Church, which Jesus will present in Himself, a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, provided the spiritual tabernacle were built up in the same manner as the material temple in Jerusalem. If the portions of the mystical building were prepared, as

Almighty grace blessed domestic worship, how glorious would be our church assemblies ; and how beautifully, and how rapidly would the spiritual temple, grow up in all things unto Christ, who is its Head, to the manifest honour of the Eternal Trinity! If family worship also, were universal or even general through the land, and the great Council of the nation, Lords and Commons, were to assemble, as the hereditary and chosen representatives of its vast family, with the impress of domestic worship fresh upon their hearts, it would be absolutely impossible to give one moment's admission to the monstrous and mischievous sentiment, that religion has nothing to do with plans and policies, involving the interests of one hundred and thirty million of immortal beings. A sentiment, virtually, if not in words, the same with the decrees of infidel France, when its legislators put it upon record, as the law of their country, that death was an eternal sleep, and that there was no God in heaven. The public prayers, with which a sacred wisdom on the part of our forefathers, determined that the momentous deliberations of Parliament should commence on every day of its sitting, would then become, as they ought to be, a

blessed opportunity of asking, and a blessed ground of expecting, the favour of Almighty God upon them, for an issue tending to the common good, and to his great glory.

(2.) *Family worship is also a duty which the Christian owes to his fellow creatures, as well as to God.* Allow me to make one very common and indeed very unquestionable supposition. If it be granted me, I know not how the inference can be avoided; and therefore I must leave it to the conscience of those who neglect family religion. Does the Holy Spirit convince any one of sin, shew him the need of a Saviour's Atonement and Righteousness, fill his heart with earnest desires to flee from the wrath to come, make him anxious for fellowship with Jesus, that he may thus enjoy Him as a portion, and imitate Him as an example? Now, if that individual, over whose opened heart angels are rejoicing, and in whom the Lord of angels who bought him sees the travail of his soul, be placed in a prayerless family, will he not be hindered in seeking the way to Zion, so far as the want of means of grace can hinder him? If on the other hand, he have a family altar, where the Redeemer's sacrifice is pleaded by faith to all around it,

and a dwelling, where God is worshipped in the beauty of holiness, would he not feel his heart strengthened, and his feet upheld to run the way of God's commandments? Would it make no difference, whether he were led by the necessities of his case to his secret and sad chamber, as the prophets of the Lord by Obadiah to their caves; or as Elijah to the wilderness, and there fed alone, when he might have the wine and milk of evangelical consolation in communion with holy brethren; who having themselves tasted that the Lord is gracious, would gladly lead him to the same fountain of all-sufficient happiness? I grant that such a chamber might be the saddened and fainting Christian's Patmos, where God might exhibit the glorious sovereignty of his grace, in brighter revelations of the Saviour's love, and the Saviour's law of love, than if he had been partaker with the most spiritual assemblies of his fellow-christians. But the external hindrances would be the same: and as God works by means, in ordinary cases, to build up his beloved in their most holy faith; and as family praying in the Holy Ghost is one of those means; it must be a guilt, at which to tremble indeed, where such stumbling blocks are laid before the little ones

of the Redeemer: and it were better that a millstone were hung around the neck of him who lays them there, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea, than that he should so offend.

Even as the contributions that are poured into the treasury of God for the spread of his Son's truth throughout the world, by various religious societies, are formed of small sums, the least of which would be missed; or as the waters of the ocean are formed of the little rills that fall from the mountains into the rivers, and thus flow into the bosom of the great deep; so does the religion of the community arise from the aggregate godliness of families and individuals. Every household therefore, wherein God is honoured and worshipped in spirit and in truth, and wherein men go from confessing Him at the family altar, to confess Him in every occupation of relative life, provides an absolute outpouring of godliness upon the mass of society. There is a savour of the name of Jesus, spread over it with delightful fragrancy. There is a positive increase of public holiness; and in the same degree, a blessing bestowed upon the land and its inhabitants.

If the Canaanites had their religion—a mere godless superstition, whereby they were misled and lost, did it not become Abram to exhibit that better form of worship, which God the Holy Ghost had taught him to know and love? If the world has its religion, stamped with its own image, and bearing its own superscription, the mere counterfeit of that which God requires; shall not the Christian, when he sees deluded men, taking service with Satan, and worshipping, with the blinded idolaters around him, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, and whatsoever is not of the Father, but is of the world—feel the power of his Saviour's claim upon him, to exhibit in his own practice, the new and better way of peace and happiness of which the world knows nothing? If Noah, as a preacher of righteousness, condemned the world, while he became heir of the righteousness which is by faith, shall not you, who believe, and hold fast to your hearts, the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, leave family and therefore personal irreligion without excuse, so far as your own example, and that of your household can extend? And I would ask, whether there be any better method of bearing this testimony, than

by walking, like David, within your house with a perfect heart; and opening, like Daniel, the windows of an unpretending consistency, to Him whose you are and whom you ought to serve?

Intercession also, which composes an essential, and truly fragrant part of the general incense of family prayer, is a blessing upon others. Little did the hardened transgressors in Sodom think, that Abraham was pleading for them. Little did they dream, that if an overwhelming awe of Jehovah had not closed his lips from uttering one more petition, their city would have been saved from the fire of heaven, for the sake of that righteous family which he bore on his heart before God. And if there be consolations in prayer for the wrestlers with God at his throne of grace, it is not the least, that while blessings will be given to the intercessor for others, in his own soul, even as the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends; the souls of others may also be given, according to the divine purpose, to such supplication, as God's appointed way that they should be led to Jesus. Intercessory prayer is greatly neglected in Christian families, and much wrong is thereby done to many, who

have a right to expect at our hands, a pleading remembrance on their behalf with God. It ought not so to be. I affectionately ask of you who have family altars, that it may not be so with you. When you remember the Sacrifice of Christ, when you remember his all prevailing Intercession for yourselves, do not forget to present others by Him to the Father; that they also may have the sprinkling of the same Atonement, and the Almighty plea of the same Advocate.

It would be easy to continue this subject, and to extend it far beyond the limits hitherto reached; but the time allows not. I merely aim, to strike a few of the chords which should vibrate upon your hearts, when this great theme is opened, and would leave you, who are spiritual, to make the modulations. I must not however close my remarks without a few words of appeal.

To the rulers of prayerless families. I would be clear from your blood; and therefore, I would beseech you to be clear from the blood of those, whose eternal interests God hath providentially intrusted to you, as well as their present need and bodily welfare. "Prayerless families are so many defenceless citadels, lying open and exposed to the incursion of every foe:

whereas the houses of the truly devout, are like castles where the Lord dwells, and which are garrisoned with the Divine Presence." Are you the appointed warders of these towers? See then, that you neglect not your charge; see that you do not leave them without the Almightiness of God for their protection. I do not indeed expect that you should pray with your domestic circle, until the Spirit of grace and supplication has been poured upon you, overruling and inciting you to plead with God for yourselves: because it were an absolute contradiction to the dealing of God to indulge such an expectation. Abram built no altar, until Jehovah had appeared unto him, and lighted up the knowledge of salvation within his heart. Oh that God therefore, even God the Holy Ghost, may open the windows of heaven, and pour out the grace of conversion upon you; that you may look in holy faith to Jesus; and then by the light of your example, that others also may be led to Him; so that eventually, you and yours may become one fold, under one Shepherd! Why should your houses be like the mountains of Gilboa, on which no heavenly dews fall to water and refresh them? Why should children, or ser-

vants, whose hearts the Holy Spirit may have touched and changed, have to feel the barrenness of spiritual things in your family, and mourn their own sad portion in it? This profaneness will not die with you. It may be, as I have already observed, a dreadful legacy to those who survive you. The worshippers of God will be grieved for what they daily see, and what they daily miss, in your houses; and the ungodly will be confirmed in their rebellion by the example of a prayerless master or mistress: or, more awful still, of both together; of both united in a fearful conspiracy against the honour of God, and the souls of others. Shall you and yours labour for the meat that perisheth, as if there were no other world, but that in which you live: and wholly neglect the bread that came down from heaven, the flesh of the son of man, which He gave for the life of the world? Shall you and yours live, as if there were no Father who made the world, and adopted his saints to glorify Him; no Saviour, essential Deity, in human flesh, who redeemed them to God by his blood; and no Holy Ghost, who puts Christ into the hearts of his disciples, and seals them unto salvation?

Are you, however, at all anxious concerning

your own salvation, and desirous of coming to Jesus merely for your own instruction; and, it may be, by night and in concealment from the world, whose ridicule you dread? And shall it suffice you to be thus cowardly—to perform one duty in a corner, and omit every other—to seek a Saviour personally to yourselves, and yet bar the doors of your house against Him? Awake from this delusion, and let not the fear of man any longer bring a snare upon you. In times of wasting pestilence, it was customary to mark those houses wherein the plague was raging, with a cross, which testified to the misery of its inhabitants. Beware that there be no mark upon your houses, to shew that the deep and deadly infection and plague-spot of family ungodliness hath infected the members within. There can be no sanctification in the outward comfort of such prayerless households; and the curse of God, not less dreadful, because it is invisible, will be poured out, in blinded minds, hardened hearts, seared consciences, and spirits of slumber. If you, who are rulers of prayerless families, know any thing of these awful dangers, by God's teaching, will you allow another night to pass without erecting the family altar? If any of you are prayerless heads of

prayerless families, how shall you escape the wrath of God, while you thus continue in sin and encourage others in their rebellion, by the authority and influence of your examples? Follow not a multitude to do evil. Be not encouraged in family atheism, because there are so many who profess it. Will you indeed rush with the herd into the deeps, and perish, because you have company in your destruction?

Will you tell God, and his people, and the world, that you are so tied and bound and hindered from the performance of religious duties at home, by fear and apprehension, that you cannot conduct family worship as you ought? That is a wretched modesty which is ashamed of duty. Name it not before God, with any hope that He will accept an excuse which your own unbelief alone has induced you to make. Would God this might be the last prayerless day in every house around us! Would God that the Book of Life were opened in the midst of every family circle! Then might it be hoped that salvation had indeed come to every such dwelling. There would be few greater joys in the life of a minister, and in the stores of mercy, wherewith, amidst its trials, difficulties, and hindrances, he may still lift up his heart to give

God the glory of having in any degree blessed it, than that he should be summoned, to commence the duty and privilege of domestic worship and instruction, in the house of any hitherto prayerless family.

SERMON XIV.

ABRAM'S FAITH IN ECLIPSE.

GENESIS XII. 10—14.

AND THERE WAS A FAMINE IN THE LAND: AND ABRAM WENT DOWN INTO EGYPT TO SOJOURN THERE; FOR THE FAMINE WAS GRIEVOUS IN THE LAND. AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN HE WAS COME NEAR TO ENTER INTO EGYPT, THAT HE SAID UNTO SARAI HIS WIFE, BEHOLD NOW, I KNOW THAT THOU ART A FAIR WOMAN TO LOOK UPON: THEREFORE IT SHALL COME TO PASS, WHEN THE EGYPTIANS SHALL SEE THEE, THAT THEY SHALL SAY, THIS IS HIS WIFE: AND THEY WILL KILL ME, BUT THEY WILL SAVE THEE ALIVE. SAY, I PRAY THEE THOU ART MY SISTER: THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH ME FOR THY SAKE: AND MY SOUL SHALL LIVE BECAUSE OF THEE.

THE biography of the Bible is a gallery of portraits; and every picture in it is painted with the unflattering pencil of the Holy Ghost. Why is it thus? Why are not the failings of holy men cast into shade, and their excellences brought out into the strongest and clearest

lights? Surely, not only because such painting would be inconsistent with the truth of God; but that another, and a most important purpose may be answered by this impartial representation of good and evil, sin and holiness, in the saints of the Most High. While the household of salvation glorify God, for the triumphs of his grace, which made these elder worthies of the Church what they were; their manifest haltings in the divine life are meant to warn us to have no other pattern of imitation than the Great Exemplar of the Church; and to be followers of others, only as their path was trodden according to the blessed footsteps of his most holy life. Therefore it is, that lest men should idolize the virtues of their fellow worms of the earth; and think all would be well, if their standard were attained, the wisdom of God permitted them to fall into sin; and that, in the exercise of those very graces, for which they are brought before the notice of the Church. A lesson is thus read, that no flesh should glory in the presence of God. A testimony is thus given to the needfulness of that fountain which is opened in Christ Jesus for sin and for uncleanness. The believer's completeness is shewn, not to be in himself; but in the Incar-

nate Word—the everlasting perfection of his disciples. The Christian is taught to raise his view of goodness above all created example; to be holy as God is holy, and perfect, as God is perfect. O how increasingly dear, in every instance of human infirmity, which the Christian feels in himself, or sees in others, should be the finished salvation of his Lord! How precious, in the unquestionable concurrency of all example, that "*there is not a just man upon earth, who doeth good, and sinneth not*,"[1] should be the love and work of Him whose perfect righteousness is the only cause of justification before God!

Among these examples, that of Abram is very striking. We have followed his path thus far in brightness; and seen, I hope, something of the beauty of his walk of faith. We are now bidden to look upon his temporary eclipse, and notice the dark shadow through which he must pass, before the restoring Spirit of God brings him again into the light and truth of that simple belief which was yet the eminent characteristic of his gracious life and conduct. The subject has two divisions.

[1] Eccles. vii. 20.

I. ABRAM'S OFFENCE.

II. HIS REBUKE.

And may God the Holy Ghost make our consideration of the virtues and failings of the father of the faithful, convincing to those, who walk in the sight of their own eyes, and after the poor devices of their own carnal policies; and may He commend this portion of the patriarch's history, even to Christians, so prone, as all are, to walk rather by the glimmerings of their own reason, than by the eye of faith, singly and simply directed to the Sun of Righteousness!

I. ABRAM'S OFFENCE.

He went on journeying still towards the south, increasing the distance from the land of his former idolatries at every step; passing through the country of promise, in its length and breadth, so that he might see its beauty; and be graciously led towards the place wherein he was for a little while to sojourn. But now a mysterious providence befel him, putting his faith to a severe trial, and weighing it in the balances, with a temptation, against which it was found wanting. There was a famine in the land—in that very Canaan where God had promised him a heritage and a possession.

Was this then indeed the place whither the Most High had led him; for which he was to leave the plenty and wealth of Chaldea? Immediately after having built his altar, and witnessed for God amidst surrounding idolatries, must he strike his tent and depart, lest he and his household die of hunger? Even so. And what is this mysterious dispensation, but a type of the walk of faith? Afflictions may, and will abound for Christ. They who will live godly in Him must suffer persecution. They must deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow Him. Trials and temptations will arise out of their very privileges, and to an extent, which may induce the short-sighted worldliness of unconverted men to consider them as fools, for resigning so much of present enjoyment, for such a manifest portion of conflict and trial as must attend a gracious confession of Christ crucified. But "*wisdom is justified of her children.*"[1] Canaan was still the land of promise, though oppressed by famine. And there are unsearchable riches in Christ, although the inheritors of his salvation may be visited with outward trouble. In the world they may have

[1] Matt. xi. 19.

tribulation, and that for his name's sake, but in Him, they shall have a peace which the world can neither give nor take away; and their consolations also will abound by Christ.

The sad and humiliating infirmity of Abram, now under our examination, was not a solitary instance. The snare of the fowler was spread again, even in the sight of the bird so hardly escaped before; again was the prey taken captive, and only delivered by the unchangeable mercy of God, acting towards his poor, weak, sinful friend, according to the promises and provisions of the everlasting covenant. He committed precisely the same offence towards Abimelech, King of Gerar,[1] twenty-four years after this grievous distrust of God: as if it were to shew how fearfully sin continues to abound, even in the hearts of those, from whom its curse and condemnation are removed for ever: and how much more the grace of God abounds in their pardon and restoration. Nay, nearly one hundred years after this period, and when Abraham's dust was mingled with that of Sarah in the cave of Machpelah,[2] Isaac his son was guilty of precisely the same sin; and that too,

[1] Gen. xx. [2] Gen. xxvi.

immediately after a most gracious revelation, wherein Jehovah had pledged his faithfulness and his oath, to do exceeding abundantly for him, above all that he could ask or think. Oh what malignity and power are there in the strong and insidious workings of that *evil heart of unbelief which departeth from the living God*,[1] even when his children have just received the most solemn assurances of his love! In the very place and circumstances, where Abram's second denial of Sarah took place, did Isaac also deny Rebekah to be his wife; as though the awful example was meant expressly to teach every believing parent, that his sins and failures in the obligations of the divine life, may be evil examples to his children, and stumbling-blocks in the way of their spiritual course.

It will, however, be needful to approach the sin of Abram more closely and examine it

(1) *In its acting.* It was a decided prevarication. Sarah was indeed his half sister, as being the daughter of his father Terah, by another wife. So far he spake the truth. But he meant to deceive the Egyptians as to the fact that she was also his wife; and thus his prevarication involves, (as such miserable sub-

[1] Heb. iii. 12.

terfuges always must involve) the very essence of an untruth. For what is a falsehood? That which is either done or said to make those who see or hear the act or the speech, receive an impression concerning it, which the doer or the sayer knows to be essentially contrary to the fact and reality. *How are the mighty fallen! How is the gold become dim, how is the most fine gold changed!*[1] What a great and mournful departure has Abram made from the way of God, and the simplicity of faith! These things are written for our ensamples, who profess to be his seed. *Let him therefore, that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*[2] And may the everlasting arms of power, love, and faithfulness, keep us in the hour of temptation, which shall assuredly come to try our faith and confidence in the God of our salvation!

But such passages as these, are portions of holy writ, whither the sceptic gladly runs, as to a vantage-ground, from which he may hope to strike a heavier blow against the truth of God, and cast discredit upon his word. It is needful therefore, that while we entirely and unreservedly condemn the offence of Abram, and warn his spiritual posterity against sinning after the

[1] 2 Sam. i. 19. Lam. iv. 1. [2] 1 Cor. x. 12.

similitude of his transgression, we also view the subject in its proper light, and deny the calumny heaped by infidels upon this man of God, as though not only a mean and sordid love of life had led him to this falsehood—for so let it be plainly called—but that he was willing even to be enriched with sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and men servants, and maid servants, and she asses, and camels, and pieces of silver, given both by Pharaoh and Abimelech, as the detestable purchase of his wife's dishonour. The charge is utterly groundless. One more unjust was never made against the Saints of the Most High, by those who say, "There, there, so would we have it." But it is at the same time a solemn caution to those Saints, how they walk; lest at any time they give the enemies of God, occasion to blaspheme. I cannot believe that Abram's personal safety was the first object in his mind, and the fountain whence this stream of guilty terror flowed. The promise of Jehovah, that in his seed should all the families of the earth be blessed—a promise for which he had forsaken all, to follow in God's appointed way, was the leading subject of his thoughts, and the centre of his heart's repose, for his own, and for the Church's salvation. If he were then to die,

how could the promise be fulfilled? The Egyptians and the men of Gerar were strangers, as he believed, to the true God. If Sarah were torn from him, that promise, as it seemed, must come to an end for evermore. Hence he was led to that crooked and most indefensible policy, of making Sarah a partner in his untruth, and charging her soul, as well as his own, with the guilt of falsehood before God; that she also might be instrumental in avoiding that peril which he dreaded above all things—even the loss of the world's Redeemer, in his posterity. Jacob was a believer in the word and covenant of God, when he was led by his mother's most unholy persuasion to obtain the blessing of the birthright from his father Isaac. And thus they who still lean only for salvation upon the Lord Jesus Christ, fall into temptation and a snare, because they look not beyond themselves —and therefore think "the Lord's arm to be shortened that it cannot save, and his ear heavy that it cannot hear." Out of Abram's very interest therefore for the Church of God, does Satan take an advantage. And thus doth he transform himself into an angel of light, that he may spread guilt and darkness over the disciples of Christ. Abram thought there was no

fear of God in Egypt or Gerar. But where was the fear of God, that should have been within his own heart, when he could thus do an act, which in its manifest tendencies, was calculated to turn the very promise into misery to himself and his wife?

A greater danger, not only to our souls, but to our present true interest and happiness, lurks in deviating from the straight forward path of moral rectitude, than any which we can hope to escape by mean subterfuges and prevarications. The blessing of God, immediate as well as future, must only be expected to rest upon us, as "*in simplicity and godly sincerity we have our conversation in the world.*"[1] A lie was never necessary in any possible exigency of human life: and if the followers of our Lord are led astray by the devil to depart from Scriptural principles, in order to eke out the measures of his Almightiness, wisdom, care, and love, by the poor and dishonourable expediences of their own device, He will confound them in the Babel of their own building. The strength of Pharaoh to which they flee shall be their shame, and their

[1] 2 Cor. i. 12.

trust in the shadow of Egypt, their confusion. The Saviour might anoint the eyes of one blind from his birth, with clay made of earth and spittle; for his own Almightiness could make means apparently the most contradictory, successful. But if feeble man shall thus pursue his own foolish policies, to remove his difficulties, they will only become more inveterate, and more hopeless.

Nor let it be forgotten, by those who profess religion, and who should be jealous of the divine honour, that the more conspicuously the believer stands in the world's eye, the more injurious is the sin of his evil example. When the Saviour is thus wounded He may well say, "*It was not an enemy that reproached me; for then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance.*"[1]

Watch then, and pray against the devices of Satan to make you fall into any insincerity of walk before God: and let him not stand upon his high places in your sin before the Church,

[1] Psalm lv. 12, 13.

to wound others of its members; and bid the infidel stand beside him to enjoy his triumph.

(2.) Abram's sin must now be considered *In its Principle.* And in one word, the impulse was *Unbelief.* He exercised a renowned faith in the *final* promise of God; acting in high and gracious trust upon it. But he fails—painfully and very sinfully fails, in not exercising his belief with equal steadfastness in reference to *intervening circumstances,* to which both the promise and his faith were equally applicable. He trusted God for the *end:* but started aside in this case, like a broken bow, when called to rely implicitly upon Him for the *means* of producing that consummation. Alas for this common error, so destructive to the peace, as well as so unworthy of the high vocation of Christian professors! They can confide in Him "*who of God is made unto them wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,*"[1] for all the infinitely precious, and everlastingly enduring interests of their souls. But they act as if they were called to lean upon a broken reed, when bidden to trust Him with the little interests of a day, and the petty con-

[1] 1 Cor. i. 30.

cerns of a body which to-morrow may be laid in the grave. They can suspend, with full assurance of faith, their expectation of pardon upon the propitiation of the cross. They can look confidently to that Everlasting Righteousness which the world's Redeemer has brought in by his perfect obedience, as their title to eternal life—sure beyond the possibility of successful challenge: and yet amidst the comforts of this unhesitating dependence, they can almost doubt the tender love, and infinite might of their heavenly Father, in matters of daily concernment. As though He who spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, would not, with Him also freely give them all things.[1] Believers have both the *ground* of faith, and the *grace* of faith: and yet they are continually acting as if the covenant, instead of being built upon the rock of ages, God in Christ, was set upon a quicksand; as if that foundation which bears the weight of a world's salvation, would not sustain a falling hair of the head, which has hardly weight enough to carry it to the ground at all. The moment a Christian turns aside to live by sense, he will not credit

[1] Romans viii. 32.

the promises, or the truth of their unchangeable Giver, unless he be bribed with sensible consolations. He will not rest his soul upon the bare undertakings of God in his behalf, if the props of manifest providences seem about to be withdrawn. "*Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.*"[1]

A faith, thus feeble and interrupted, is so sinfully hasty, that it cannot wait upon God, even for a moment: but if the answer of its petulant petition come not on the instant, is ready at once to say, "*The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard.*"[2] Whereas it is faith's truest duty and dearest joy to attend upon its Almighty object, and say, "*I will look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.*"[3] The promise is faithful, the performance will be sure.

Marked and sad was the difference between Peter, crying in the zeal of his love to Jesus, "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water;" and that same Peter, when he exclaimed in his unbelieving agony, "Lord save

[1] John xx. 25. [2] Psalm xciv. 7. [3] Micah vii. 7.

me." Peter differs awfully from himself, when hearing only the Lord's voice saying "Come;" and giving him in that invitation, the assurance of an inviolable safety; and when his ear opened only to the howling of the winds. He differed awfully from himself, when seeing Christ walking the deep—the pledge of his own preservation from sinking; and when he looked only on the waves which threatened to engulph him. The moment a Christian allows himself to consult flesh and blood, instead of God, his word, his precept, his promise, all is dark, discouraging, and threatening. "The fear of man bringeth a snare:" and he will not escape it, without injury to his peace. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as the Mount Sion, which may not be removed, but standeth fast for ever." They who turn away from Him, to terrify themselves with the threatenings of second causes, when the providential heaven seems to lower around them, are wandering from mountain to hill, having forgotten their resting place. Oh for the voice of God to say to such a trembling believer, "*I, even I, am He which comforteth you! Who art thou that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that should die, and of the Son of man that shall be made as grass; and*

forgettest the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?[1] "*Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord of Hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread: and He shall be for a sanctuary.*"[2]

If the Saviour's love hath been made known to you,—if you can realize your interest in his engagements on your behalf, you will do wisely often and thankfully to consider the grounds of your faith. The promise of help in every time of need, is sealed and made sure. The faithfulness of God is concerned; and his oath has been uttered. Do not then dishonour Him by unbelief, and by fleeing to sinful refuges, when the hour of trial comes. Meet it in the might of God. Stand by and see his salvation. No flaw will ever be detected in the beauty of his providences. The fault will invariably be found

[1] Isaiah li. 12, 13. [2] Isaiah viii. 12—14.

in your infidelity. And therefore, the Redeemer first rebuked the want of trust in his disciples, "O ye of little faith wherefore did ye doubt," and then rebuked the wind and the sea; and there was a great calm. Do not expect a sufficient and unfailing supply from the shallow rill of your own device, when you turn away from the eternal fountain of God's Almightiness. Do not set a pile of dust, and a heap of ashes, above Him who made and sustains the world. Do not esteem any created hindrance and antagonist to be an enemy, whom the might of the Creator cannot subdue. Rest upon the arm of God, ye who acknowledge Him as your trust, in all providential difficulties. "*There hath no temptation taken you,* (and no one can take you,) *but such as is common to man: and God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will, with the temptation, also make a way for you to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*"[1]

But when the risings of unbelief become your shame and your sorrow, I intreat you, whose hidden life is notwithstanding, that of faith in the Son of God, not to question the

[1] 1 Cor. x. 13.

truth of your gracious trust, for every fainting fit that comes over it, as to the promises in this life. Abram lived not only to regret his sin, but to bear many a noble testimony, and make many a bold stand for the God of his salvation. Mourn and lament for your unbelief, so dishonourable to God, and so unworthy of his character. Betake you to the blood of sprinkling. Betake you to God's restoring Spirit: and seek new strength from Him, that you may no longer walk, like Peter, afar off; but abide unshrinkingly with Him, who hath said to the feeblest member of his spiritual Church, "I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee." Have no dread, equal to that of displeasing God: and no prayer more urgent than that of holy David, "*Hold Thou up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.*"[1]

II. Upon THE REBUKE OF ABRAM'S SIN, time forbids me to dwell at length: and surely it cannot be needful to lay it in many words before those who have learned to form any estimate of the tender mercy, wherewith God heals the backsliders from his faith, and continues to love them freely.

[1] Psalm xvii. 5.

(1.) *That rebuke was gracious, beyond all human expectation.* Abram might well have looked for a fearful manifestation of divine displeasure, when he proposed to be more wise than God. He might have well expected, that the falsity wherewith he had charged his own soul, and his wife's soul, might have been severely visited upon him: and that as he had sown to the wind, he might reap the whirlwind, in finding Sarah taken indeed from him, and made the concubine of Pharaoh, at one time, and of some of the people of Abimelech at another. But blessed be God who doth not deal with us after our sins, nor reward us after our iniquities! Blessed be God who pours coals of fire, upon the coldness of love and faith, within the hearts of his servants, when both are ready quite to die, by loading them with mercies instead of judgments! Thus, when his people, and Abram among them, *were but a few men in number, yea, very few, and strangers in the land; when they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people; He suffered no man to do them wrong; yea, He reproved kings for their sakes.*" [1] How won-

[1] Psalm cv. 12, 13.

derfully does He interfere to bring them forth from the furnace into which their own unbelief has cast them; and thus indicate at once the mightiness of his love, and the sovereignty of his grace!

It deserves remark, that while the faith of Abram and Sarah is recorded by the Holy Ghost, in Hebrews xi, their unbelief, in these and other instances, is passed by in absolute silence; as though it were to shew the Church, what doubtless the same eternal Spirit testified to them, that God had blotted out as a thick cloud their transgressions, and as a cloud their sins of distrust and infidelity. The example of their failing in the grace of faith, is given in the history, as a warning; while in the good report of them, the strong exercise of that grace is alone remembered, as an example to the Church. And not only did they depart in peace and safety, both from Egypt and Gerar, but they went away loaded with presents and benefits. Was this then an encouragement to sin? Was this dealing towards them, meant to shew that God lightly regarded their iniquity, —nay, that God approved it? Oh, far from us be the dreadful impiety of such a supposition! No: it was the overflowing of mercy,—it was

the profusion of love,—it was the outpoured balm of unimaginable tenderness; whereby alone, perhaps, their hearts could be bound up. It was the Omnipotence of goodness to keep them from despair; to lift up the hands of their faith, and to strengthen its feeble knees that they might better run the way of God's commandments. Where sin had abounded, grace much more abounded. It is equally God's present mode of dealing with his unbelieving children: and thus doth He say to them, (may every one of them hear his voice, and be led by the bands of his tenderness to rest solely and implicitly upon Him,) "*O Israel return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him*"[1]

(2.) But infinitely tender as this rebuke might be, *it was yet humiliating, almost beyond any other that might be imagined.* In one case, Pharaoh, a heathen king, remonstrates with Abram, "What is this that thou hast done unto me, why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife?" And the father of the faithful thus

[1] Hosea xiv. 1, 4.

overtaken with a sense of his sin, and bowed to the dust by the equity and righteousness of his reprover, is left without reply. In the other case, Abimelech said unto him, "What hast thou done unto us, and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom, a great sin? Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done:" and Abram can only offer a mean and dishonest apology.

The pleading, expostulating, reproaching look of the persecuted Saviour, might well break the heart of Peter, so that he went forth and wept bitterly. But there was an especial shamefulness to Abram, in the humiliation of being placed under the rebuke of such reprovers: even as to Jonah, when the heathen shipmaster came and awoke him, and said, "*What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God; if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.*"[1] And thus must the erring children of their Father who is in heaven expect to be humbled, and dishonoured, and convinced, even by worldly men, when they forsake the Rock of their strength, and the rule

[1] Jonah i. 6.

of their God, and the obligations, under which redeeming love has laid them, to follow miserable expediencies, that they may avoid a difficulty, or secure an advantage, by means, of which, men high-minded and honourable, according to this world's erring standard, would be ashamed. Avoid the snare; and when such temptations assail you, answer in the gracious loftiness of Nehemiah's spirit, "So will not I, because of the fear of God."

It is the sin and the shame of our public, our social, and, too generally, of our more private conduct, that instead of standing upon the holy and immoveable rock of God's perfect word, adapted as it is to every possible procedure and circumstance of human life, and looking with a single eye, that God in all things may be glorified, we make the ever-shifting quicksand of a poor and unworthy expediency, the foundation, on which we base our actions Godward, and man-ward. That expediency, has a most mischievous power of adapting itself to all the selfish policies of a fallen nature, prone to seek its own things, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's. The consequence is obvious. Our professing Christianity, mournfully wants the magnificence of simplicity, and the unequi-

vocal beauty of a devoted consistency. Nationally and individually, we are thus placed at the tender mercies of every imminent temptation; and in our miserable short-sightedness, have no eye for the glory, the help, or the consolations of that God who has promised to honour them who honour Him, by an honest and intrepid connexion of Himself, his law, his covenant, and his praise, with all they think, and do, and say. That sad and mean expediency brought sin, shame, and danger, even upon the friend of God. It has thrust, as I fear, our country near to the awful brink of national convulsion. It defiles and impoverishes the course of our private actions. The blessing of the Most High God can never be expected to attend it. May the Eternal Spirit of God, pour forth the grace of a simple faith in his wise sovereignty, and fatherly care of his Church upon us; so that all of us who profess gracious membership with the Lord Jesus Christ, may turn round in any difficulty, however apparently insurmountable, upon the lying seductions of worldly expediency, which would lead us to dishonour God by resting on creature helps; as Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, said to the King of Babylon: "*O Ne-*

buchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O King. But if not, be it known unto thee, O King, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up!" Daniel iii. 16—18.

SERMON XV.

THE SEPARATION BETWEEN ABRAM AND LOT.

GENESIS XIII. 8, 9.

ABRAM SAID UNTO LOT, LET THERE BE NO STRIFE, I PRAY THEE BETWEEN ME AND THEE, AND BETWEEN MY HERDMEN AND THY HERDMEN; FOR WE BE BRETHREN. IS NOT THE WHOLE LAND BEFORE THEE? SEPARATE THYSELF, I PRAY THEE FROM ME. IF THOU WILT TAKE THE LEFT HAND, THEN I WILL GO TO THE RIGHT: OR IF THOU DEPART TO THE RIGHT HAND, THEN I WILL GO TO THE LEFT.

CIRCUMSTANCES of pressing urgency may occur, to separate spiritual minds from those habits and associations, in which they delight: but the moment such pressure is removed, they will return with joy to their rest, and resume their beloved employments. The famine obliged Abram to go down, and sojourn in Egypt: no sooner however does he learn that the Lord had visited Canaan, in giving his people bread, than he journies thitherward again; "*for where his*

treasure was, there was his heart also."[1] He entered the land of promise at its southern extremity, which lay towards the north-east of Egypt; but he halted not until he had again reached Bethel, where he had built his altar, and called on the name of the Lord; that he might resume his beloved worship, and glorify again the God of his salvation, in the scene of former mercies.

It might be imagined, that he would now remain at peace on this consecrated ground. But very little is known of the divine dealing, by those who have not learned that wheresoever the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty build their rest, their heavenly Father will put a thorn in it, to hinder them from lying too closely and securely there. Trial found Abram in Bethel; and the cause originated with his own family. The instructive history of this inroad on his comfort may shew us—

I. THE CONDUCT OF ABRAM.

II. THE CONDUCT OF LOT.

The dark foil, upon which the diamond is mounted, serves to bring out more strongly the brilliancy of the gem; and such is the power of

[1] Matt vi. 21.

contrast in the present case. It will be noticed by shewing,

I. The conduct of Abram.

The soil of Canaan, with little exception, was occupied by the people of the land, in actual tenure; although the father of the faithful had God's own warrant for its possession. When therefore Abram came thither, rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold; when Lot also, who went with him, had flocks and herds and tents, there was not sufficient pasturage to feed the whole. "*The land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together; for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell tegether.*"[1] Their prosperity, instead of increasing the closeness of family love, became the very element of family separation. This world's wealth, and the sordid opposition of interests which it involves, too often wither the charities of kindred or domestic life, or at least alienate the members of the same household much more from each other, than when their common store was less. Not so "*the unsearchable riches of Christ.*"[2] The more fully they are imparted by Him, and enjoyed by his disci-

[1] Gen. xiii. 6. [2] Eph. iii. 8.

ples, the more closely are those disciples united to each other in love, as common members of his body. Towards that unalloyed and holy wealth then, should the followers of their Lord be directed, with an unquenchable desire to possess it, and to "*be filled with all the fulness of God.*"[1]

Abram was rich; yet he was the friend of God. How was this? How can the camel go through the eye of a small needle, or the rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven? Hath not man's Saviour, and man's unerring Prophet put the solemn question, and invested it with difficulties that seem almost to imply impossibility?' It cannot be denied that He has: and well He knew what was in the heart of man, when He put the interrogation upon record. Riches have assuredly a direct and dreadful tendency to fill us with the love of the world, rather than of that invisible and eternal good which centres in the Everlasting God, as the real wealth of his creatures. But then they involve no absolute necessity to produce this awful result. They are not adamantine bars and bolts to exclude men who have an ample portion of them from the unmoving glories of a better world. That exclusion

[1] Eph. iii. 19.

rests with their abuse. Our own corrupt nature converts the abundance which God bestows, into occasions of idolizing the gift, to the dishonour of the Almighty Giver, and of departing from Him, in the affections of the heart.

That the mere possession of riches cannot destroy a soul, is plain and obvious. Abram was rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. Lazarus was a beggar, destitute, and filled with sore disease; but when he died, angels carried this poor outcast into Abram's bosom, and there they dwell together, in the separate rest of the Lord Jesus Christ. The fault therefore, is not in God, nor in the wealth which He bestows; that so few of its possessors tread the way of salvation, and enter into the kingdom of God but that Satan thus takes advantage of our sinful nature, to make men misapply the bounties of the Most High, to his dishonour, and their own destruction. He who is rich in this world's good, is however placed in a situation of peril, which should be continually summoning him to watch and pray, that he may count all things but loss for Christ: and then with God all things are possible.

(1) The circumstances of Abram at this period of his history called forth a beautiful

exhibition of *his Disinterestedness.* Canaan had been conferred, not upon Lot, but upon his uncle, by the solemn title of an especial promise from God. Yet without a murmur, and apparently without an effort, does he say to his nephew, "*Is not the land before thee?*" And Lot is bidden to choose what portion he may please to occupy. If there be any pastures more rich, any streams more copious, in one place than another, he is directed to make his own election, with a liberality which he was little disposed to imitate. There is a largeness of heart in the offer, attesting within Abram's mind a consciousness of wealth beyond the power of Canaan, beyond the power of the world's riches to bestow. Such generosity is—if I may so speak, graciously natural to those who know that they have Christ in all things, and all things in Christ; as their Father's wisdom makes the distribution.

If Abram had been generous, simply because he was rich, his example would have been an anomaly in the world's history—a strange contradiction to the experiences of natural and unconverted man. Riches tend rather to close, than to expand the generous affections of the heart. They do not encourage their owner in

pouring them forth upon the necessities of others. Abram was, however, a saint of God. He looked therefore for his true possession beyond the sheep walks and wells of Canaan, even to a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. His portion—that on which he lived by faith, though invisible, was immeasurably more vast and magnificent, than any, about which the herdmen of Lot contended with his own: and therefore, the petty difference that could exist between a dwelling in this or that quarter of the land, was of little moment. He could afford to be generous, and give Lot the choice, where only some momentary and perishing advantage could be gained or lost to him, by his nephew's election. Alexander reserved to himself the hope of mighty conquests, in addition to the realm which was his own by birth; and therefore, he gave away many kingdoms; realizing the bright expectancy which lived continually in his eye. The Christian also, in whose heart the Holy Ghost hath lighted up a hope of blessedness to come, that maketh not ashamed, in addition to his present heritage of peace, joy, holiness, and triumph in his Redeemer, may well stand aside, in holy quiet, allowing others to press before

him, in their hot and hasty pursuit after the present and fading good, for which they pant. He may well understand the words of our Lord Jesus Christ—"*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*"[1] Such disinterestedness is equally the disciple's duty and pleasure; for it was the mind of his Great Examplar. "Ye know *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.*"[2] The Redeemer's love was, in truth, perfectly pure. The sacrifice whereby He provided reconciliation between man and God, was immense. Yet was it freely made, in behalf of those, from whom He could hope for nothing again, except to win them to love Him, by the sense of that affection wherewith "*He loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood.*"[3]

The *enemy* of our souls is continually making demands upon us for service, for peace, for hope, for body, and for soul; and never ceases crying, like the daughters of the horse leech, "*Give, give.*" But the *Saviour* of our souls, who gave Himself for them, that He might

[1] Acts xx. 35. [2] 2 Cor. viii. 9. [3] Rev. i. 5.

redeem them to God, doth, with Himself, freely give us all things. And, if such was the disinterested nature of our Lord's affection, is it not a sad and mournful sight to behold the worldliness of his disciples—the eager desire of those who profess to have in Him, wealth which the world can neither give nor take away, to be among the foremost in their endeavours to abound in earthly things: as if Mammon must still have a shrine in their hearts; or Christ were an insufficient portion; or the Father would not with Him, communicate every other blessing. Paul had learned that best lesson, which the Spirit of God could teach, for his present comfort and peace; because he had learned, in whatever state he was, therewith to be content. But then the fulness of God's salvation was his portion. Therefore the selfishness of his nature was subdued; therefore the springs of holy love to others were opened within his heart; therefore he sought not his own profit, but the profit of many, that they might be saved. And if the life which any one is now living, be the life of faith in the Son of God, it ought to be manifested to the church, and to the world, by a holy disinterestedness of conduct, which may oblige men to take

knowledge of him, that he has been with Jesus.

(2.) We have also a truly instructive example of *Abram's meekness.* He was the head of the whole family; the priest, the prophet, the king over them all. He was the especial object of the promises of God. Canaan was made over to him, and not to Lot, by the unchangeable decree, and sure declaration of the Most High. It was for him therefore, to determine where he would choose to pitch his own tent, and feed his own flocks: and it was for Lot to take what might thus be determined as his inferior portion. But while Abram freely resigns this unquestionable right of choice, with a disinterestedness, alas, so very uncommon in the world, he turns aside from his privilege with a meekness that it is impossible too much to admire. *Though he might have much boldness to enjoin Lot that which was convenient, yet for love's sake, he rather besought him.*[1] "*Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between my herdmen, and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me. If thou wilt take the*

[1] Philemon 8, 9.

left hand, then I will go to the right: or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." Full richly did the Spirit of God dwell in this disciple, enabling him to exhibit that quietude and tenderness of mind which God Himself exhibited, as the pattern of human conduct, when He became manifest in the flesh.

We admire, not merely the benefit, but the manner of bestowing it; the soft answer that turneth away wrath; the sweetness of mind and expression, like the waters of Siloam which flow softly, and yet moisten the grounds, on which they fall, more effectually, than if they rushed over them with the hoarse outpouring of a violent flood. Oh would to God, this "*ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price,*"[1] were more precious in our own! The Canaanite and the Perizzite might quarrel with each other; for they had nothing but the land, for which they contended. The unbelievers, who have their portion in this life, may rudely or fraudulently endeavour to secure its better portions, each for himself: but they who have the love of God as their portion, and his glory as their bright

[1] 1 Peter iii. 4.

and assured reversion, should meekly and mildly retire from all contest with the men of this world, and with each other. They are brethren; and it is pleasant when brethren dwell together in unity. "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.*"[1] They, in whose hearts his love is perfected, should endeavour to shew their readiness thus practically to abide the test of their discipleship. They should "*follow peace with all men, as well as holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*" "*Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.*"[2]

But this brotherly affection can only be discovered by worldly men, (sharpsighted to discover the failings of spiritual Christians,) as they behave meekly towards each other, and towards those that are without. The wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable. Endeavour therefore to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, in all your dealings with men. And, if you feel yourselves called upon to differ, see that it be without bitterness, and

[1] John xiii. 35. [2] Heb. xii. 14. 1 John iv. 7.

wrath, and the leaven of any malice in the heart. "*Sirs, ye are brethren, why do ye strive together, and do wrong, one to another?*[1]" No garment better becomes a Christian than meekness: and therefore, St. Paul bids the church at Colosse, as the elect of God, to put it on. How great and awful the Majesty of God! He is provoked every day; but though strong, He is yet patient. His paternal mildness is at least as visible as his Almighty greatness. "*Be ye then perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*"[2] Jesus Christ bids you come and learn of Him; not to open the eyes of the blind; not to raise the dead; not to cleanse the lepers; not to feed five thousand with a few loaves and fishes; but to be like Himself, meek and lowly in heart. And that which He calls upon you to learn, his Almighty Spirit waits to teach. "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.*"[3]

(3.) Nor would it be just to the patriarch, were I to omit *the prudence* of Abram, in offer-

[1] Acts. vii. 26. [2] Matt. v. 48. [3] Matt. v. 3, 5, 9.

ing this choice to his nephew. It effectually removed all cause of offence, which Lot or his herdsmen could possibly take; and was a sacrifice, well and wisely made for the security of peace and love between them. And man has no higher prudence than to count all things secondary, all things vile, all things lighter than vanity itself, in order, first, to have peace with God, even the termination of that awful strife which exists between the sinner and his Sovereign, his Maker, his Judge: and next, that his brother, his neighbour, and himself should live together in holy love. Abram trusted his interest and provision with Jehovah; and well he might; for his God would be to him a source of fulness that could never fail, a Helper, able to supply all his need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Abram had as many enemies as neighbours; for the Canaanite, and the Perizzite were then in the land; and all were waiting to devour. If, therefore, Lot and himself should quarrel, their watchful foes would be at hand, to make a prey of both. And is not Satan standing by, looking eagerly at the divisions so fearfully prevalent in the Church of God? Doth it then become its members to weaken that Church, and lay it open to the

attacks of the serpent and the serpent's seed, while its members bite and devour one another? Surely a gracious disinterestedness in the things of this world, and a looking for our true heritage in the Redeemer, is our real wisdom. "God Incarnate, as the Father's Mediatorial Servant dealt very prudently. What was the manifestation of that prudence? *For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame; and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*"[1] Moses was prudent, when he *refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.*"[2] Amaziah was prudent, when he resigned the hundred talents, and the hundred thousand valiant men, whom he had enlisted into his army, and trusted his cause with the God of battles, rather than rest upon an arm of flesh, contrary to the will and bidding of Jehovah.[3] Paul was prudent when he said, "*I count all things but loss, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him.*[4]" And it is the Christian's only

[1] Heb. xii. 2. [2] Heb. xi. 24—26. [3] 2 Chron. xxv. 9. [4] Phil. iii. 8, 9.

wisdom, that which the Holy Ghost teacheth, "to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; trusting that all other things shall be added unto him." Be this our prudence, our knowledge, in the school, where God the Holy Ghost maketh wise unto salvation. "*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*"[1]

II. A few words must suffice to notice THE CONDUCT OF LOT: and only a few are needed: for it is broadly and painfully contrasted with that of Abram; and he who sees and understands the lights of a picture, has a good directory, by which to comprehend the breadth and gloom of its shadows.

(1.) Lot's behaviour to his uncle was marked by *A spirit of selfish covetousness.* Without one recorded wrestling of better thoughts against his grovelling desire of the richer portion, he took Abram at his word, "*He lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan; that it*

[1] Phil. iv. 6, 7.

was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east, and they separated themselves the one from the other." [1]. One ruling desire, the love of wealth, filled the eye of his mind, and blinded him to higher duties. That covetousness which is idolatry, took possession of his heart; and most sordid was the worship, paid within these chambers of imagery, to riches and distinction. A more unfitting, a more mean, a more unworthy idol than the eager desire to be rich, can hardly be set up in the soul; nor one which more effectually chokes all holy breathings for the salvation of God, and for a portion in the riches of the glorious gospel of his grace. "*The friendship of the world is enmity against God: whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, he must be the enemy of God.*" [2] No man can serve God and Mammon. "*Love not then the world,*" ye who express your hope of interest in its Saviour, and your desire to perfect holiness in the fear of God. "*Love not the world, neither*

[1] Gen. xiii. 10, 11. [2] James iv. 4.

the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." [1] The love of money is the root of all evil. It is the utterly noxious germ of that Upas tree of sin, beneath which so many have lain down to sleep, and dreamed they were happy, while it distilled and dropped its dew upon them, and poisoned them unto eternal death. This world's abundance may well consist with the wrath of God; as the sinners who dwelt in the cities of the plain were in plenty and fulness of bread, while the fire and brimstone were slumbering over their heads, waiting but the breath of Jehovah to enkindle them, and hurl them down.

This covetousness made Lot regardless of his uncle's right; regardless of his own great advantages, in dwelling near to Abraham; regardless of profiting by his counsels; of being defended by his power; of worshipping at his altar; and of being included within the blessings of his promise. When this spirit of selfishness is spread over the mind, it drowns all social

[1] 1 John ii. 15, 16.

love, it makes men sit loosely to the dearest of all earthly ties, responsibilities, and relations. It separates very friends, not merely those who should have one heart in the common interchange of the charities of life; but those to whom there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, and one salvation in his Son. It makes all men under its dreadful influence seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's: and I am persuaded that the gospel hath few greater hindrances among us, than that eager desire of wealth which seems to have engrossed, not only the men of this world, but those who profess to be the disciples of another Master, and the servants of a nobler Lord.

(2) The conduct of Lot is marked, by *A very awful disregard of spiritual danger*. He looked so steadily at the nature of the land where he wished to dwell, as to neglect all consideration of the character of its inhabitants. "*The men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.*"[1] They aimed at no concealment to their tremendous vices; and therefore Lot was inexcusable to pass them by.

[1] Gen. xiii. 13.

What fruit he gathered from the seed thus thoughtlessly scattered, the rest of his history plainly discloses. "*He sowed the wind, and he reaped the whirlwind.*"[1] We hear of no altar built by him, in imitation of his holy relative; who thus placed a mighty shield and barrier between himself and surrounding iniquities, by the constant worship of God. This neglect indeed, was to be expected in one whose heart was occupied mainly, with the desire of becoming rich and powerful. The conduct of Lot is, alas, too common. It is matter of every day's experience. We are continually observing, even if we stand upon the margin of the river of worldliness, without being ourselves carried away by the flood,—how many cast themselves into it, and forsake the shore, where God would have been with them, and they with God, and all things would have been theirs, as one with Christ; if thereby they may gain some pecuniary advantage. The altar is forsaken; the land of Sabbaths and sanctuaries is left behind, and men plunge themselves into foreign temptations in pursuit of wealth, as recklessly as the great conqueror of Europe plunged himself amidst the wilds, and woods, and morasses, and

[1] Hos. viii. 7.

snows of Russia, from whence he himself so hardly escaped, soon to fall from his place of greatness, and die on an obscure rock of the ocean; and where so many myriads of his devoted followers found their graves, instead of the glory for which they panted.

Nothing which wealth may bestow, can by any means compensate to a man, and especially to a young man, with principles perhaps little fixed in the truth, as it is in Jesus, and a mind opened to receive temptation, for going to live in the tents of wickedness, and for dwelling in the cities of the plain; led thither by the hope of being a little richer than he might perhaps have become, had he staid by his family altar, near to the people of God, and the heirs of promise. "*What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul; and what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*"[1] I know that occasions and necessities for such separations may arise; but let them not be sought, in the spirit of covetousness: lest God should gratify that desire with wealth, but send leanness withal into the soul; or at length, (which is at least as likely,) bid that mistaken professor of religion escape for

[1] Matt. viii. 36, 37.

his life, like Lot from the fires of Sodom, leaving the wealth thus guiltily sought, altogether unattained behind him.

I. *This history may well enforce upon us, a holy jealousy for the honour of God.* There was strife between the herdmen of Abram and Lot, and the Canaanite and the Perizzite were then in the land. What means the Holy Ghost by this notice? or is it without meaning at all? Assuredly not. The fact that they were surrounded by enemies of themselves, and of their God, was a call, both upon the uncle and the nephew, not to let those enemies see an unholy strife between them; nor to suffer such adversaries to witness them, at one moment kneeling around the same altar of peace, and the next at variance with each other. Well said Nehemiah to his brethren who sinned, while many foes stood around and beheld their iniquities, "*It is not good that ye do; ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?*"[1] Abram was well aware of this danger, and jealous for the honour of Jehovah. Aim, ye who profess his faith, to follow his

[1] Neh. v. 9.

example. Have your conversation honest in the world, and "walk in wisdom towards those who are without;" that whereas mockers would gladly speak against you as evil doers, they may be reproved who would thus blame you, seeing your good conversation in Christ. The enemies of our Lord would gladly charge your inconsistencies upon his faith; and thus encourage themselves in their rebellion against Him. Take away this cause of stumbling from them; and "*let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*"[1]

II. *We are also hereby taught the wonder-working sovereignty of God, in overruling all things, apparently the most adverse—even the sins of men—even the sins of his servants, to the advancement of his own glory, and the good of his Church.* Lot was thus enabled to preach righteousness, even to the men of Sodom. Abram had thus an opportunity to display his magnanimity and valour, in the rescue of his nephew. Lot was taught the difference between dwelling with sinners and saints, by sad experience: and God magnified his own rich

[1] Matt. v. 16.

mercy, in delivering him from those snares, and those judgments into which he had so lightly cast himself. In like manner, the sin of the Jews, in crucifying the Lord of glory, was the instrument whereby God consummated the world's salvation. The death of Stephen extended the Gospel of life, by scattering abroad its preachers from Jerusalem, throughout many lands. The sharp contention of Paul and Barnabas, which led to their separation, brought more nations within hearing of the word of life, than if they had remained together. The wrath of man thus praises God, and the remainder of that wrath He will restrain. Beware, however, of the tremendous delusion of thinking, that though God may overrule man's sin to his own glory, man may therefore sin with impunity; that his iniquity may abound, in order that God's grace may much more abound. The blood of the Son of God was upon the Jews, and upon their children, for crucifying the Lord of glory; although you and I have the means of life and mercy, instrumentally through their dreadful guilt. Walk then, in his way, in his blessing, in his love: and leave the acts of his sovereignty to his own wise disposal, lest ye die in your sins.

III. Lastly, *Learn hence, The blessing of heavenly-mindedness.* If Abram had seen nothing beyond Canaan, he would hardly have given up the best portion of it to Lot; but the view of the Canaan which awaited his soul in separate bliss, and his soul and body at the second coming of Christ, made him independent of the lesser present good. The latter had no glory in his regard, by reason of the excelling glory of the former. "*He rejoiced to see the day of Christ, he saw it, and was glad.*" This was all his salvation, and therefore all his desire: and here he had in Jesus, chosen that good part which could not be taken away from him. No other principle, than that of having our conversation in heaven, can rock our peevish spirits to sleep in difficulties; and make us live above the world. Such a tone of mind takes God at his word, in present trial and little outward hope. "*Thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain: yet that valley, which appears so dry, shall be filled with water.*"[2] "*Let your conversation then be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have; for He hath said, I will never leave you,*

[1] John viii. 56. [2] 2 Kings iii. 17.

I will never forsake you."[1] Discontent is a serpent, which stings those only who, like the serpent's self, creep upon earth. Heavenly-mindedness is the eagle's wing, to lift you above it, to the region of brightness, purity, and peace in Christ.

[1] Heb. xiii. 5.

SERMON XVI.

RIGHTEOUS RETRIBUTION.

GENESIS XIII. 14—17.

THE LORD SAID UNTO ABRAM, AFTER THAT LOT WAS SEPARATED FROM HIM, LIFT UP NOW THINE EYES, AND LOOK FROM THE PLACE WHERE THOU ART, NORTHWARD AND SOUTHWARD, AND EASTWARD AND WESTWARD. FOR ALL THE LAND WHICH THOU SEEST, TO THEE WILL I GIVE IT, AND TO THY SEED FOR EVER. AND I WILL MAKE THY SEED AS THE DUST OF THE EARTH: SO THAT IF A MAN CAN NUMBER THE DUST OF THE EARTH, THEN SHALL THY SEED ALSO BE NUMBERED. ARISE, WALK THROUGH THE LAND, IN THE LENGTH OF IT, AND IN THE BREADTH OF IT: FOR I WILL GIVE IT UNTO THEE.

THE Bible is at once the most ancient, and the most authentic, of all historical records. The penmen by whom it was actually written, were many; but the whole amazing volume was begun, continued, and ended by one Author, even God the Holy Ghost. The principle of its composition, and the matter contained in it, might therefore be expected

to differ exceedingly from those of any other book in the world. And such is really the case. Other histories describe the rise, vicissitudes, and decline of empires; the political experiments made upon them; and the wars, of which each was in its turn the prize. The word of God, on the other hand, passes rapidly over these portions of providential administration; or turns from them altogether, to rest and dwell upon incidents in the lives of private men, of whom the world knew nothing; but of whom the world was not worthy. The history of redemption as much surpasses in importance—God being Judge—the annals of the mightiest of all earthly monarchies, as the concerns of eternity outweigh those of time and sense. "*Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation*" saith Jehovah, "*shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.*"[1] Therefore do we find Abram's personal history occupying a prominent situation in the oracles

[1] Isaiah li. 6.

of God, denied to the most sagacious lawgiver, or the most renowned conqueror. The friend of God, the father of the faithful, the earthly head of the covenant made between the Persons of the ineffable Godhead, for man's salvation, stands above the illustrious of the earth, as Saul above the multitudes of Israel. What the Holy Spirit therefore, offers to our notice, in his eventful life, demands our entire reverence and regard, as ever we hope to be made partakers of that promise, which has been uttered and attested by the oath of God to him, and to his spiritual seed.

In the last discourse a contrast was drawn between the *disinterestedness*, the *meekness*, the *holy prudence* of Abram, and the *covetousness, selfishness, and reckless disregard of plunging into temptation*, which the conduct of Lot displayed. It will be something in the order of cause and consequence if we now contrast,

II. THE PROVIDENCES WHICH RESPECTIVELY BEFEL THEM.

The experience of men in all ages of the world, has borne its ample testimony to that solemn declaration of the Most High, "*Them that honour Me, I will honour; and they that*

despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."[1] The saint and the sinner, the believer and the infidel, the children of God's love and the rebels against his mercy, have been, now are, and shall be, through all time, and all eternity, willing or unwilling witnesses of its truth. Among those who believe on Him to the saving of the soul, some,—following Him fully, and others, with more divided hearts, an observant eye will often see great differences in providential dealings, as well as in gracious communications of his love. It was so with Abram and Lot: and we may proceed to review their succeeding fortunes.

(I.) THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH HAPPENED TO LOT.

He travelled onwards to the rich and fertile plain of the vale of Jordan; doubtless exulting in the wisdom of his choice, and taking credit for his prudence in securing it to himself. He led his flocks into its green pastures, and laid himself down by its still waters; and thought all was well. He was "exceeding glad of his gourd." But God had prepared a worm to smite the gourd, that it withered, and a vehement

[1] 1 Sam ii. 30.

east wind to arise, and a scorching sun of providential displeasure to beat upon his head, that he fainted.[1] He pitched his tent towards Sodom. He sought intercourse and communion with men who were sinners before the Lord exceedingly; and he appears to have affianced his daughters to the inhabitants of this awfully iniquitous city. But a speedy opportunity of correcting his erroneous judgment, was forced upon him: and he was taught by a variety of solemn lessons, that "*the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.*"[2]

(1.) *Five years after his selfish departure from Abram, he was a despoiled and plundered captive.* Five kings of the Canaanites, who had been tributaries to Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, revolted against him. Having summoned three of his vassal princes, he invaded Canaan, discomfited the kings of the five cities of the plain of Sodom, in which Lot had pitched his tent; and carried him away captive, together with those wicked men, whose exceeding iniquities had thus provoked Jehovah to punish them. Lot is found in the society of impious men; and he must take his part of

[1] Jonah iii. 6, 7. [2] 1 Cor. iii. 19.

fatherly chastisement from God, with those who had visitations of judgment in the same outward providence. Daniel, Mordecai, Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego, with many more, were saints and servants of the Most High, when the holy city was taken by Nebuchadnezzar; yet they were led captive with the guilty and obdurate nation; and were compelled to hang their harps in sorrow upon the willows of Euphrates. If it were thus with those who testified against the abominations of the land, wherein they dwelt, because it was the country of their nativity, the place of their holy solemnities, and the chosen heritage of God, surely they who left the sacred enclosure which Abram had drawn around him,—the hallowed and happy fold of a religious community, where Jehovah was known, and worshipped, and loved,—to choose a portion among idolaters and gross transgressors, for the simple love of gain, might well expect that the displeasure of God would attend and recompence their folly, with sorrow, and shame, and loss. If they who profess his service, will thus rashly and daringly sit by the seat of the scornful, and dwell among the tents of ungodliness, they must have fallen into a mournful spirit of the heart's slumber,

not to expect that God, though He leave them not alone, will reprove them, and set before them the things that they have done, by taking away the worldly idols that seduced them, and leaving them in temporal poverty, not less than spiritual emptiness. Surely Satan himself, can forge no stronger chains to bind around the heart of a professing servant of God, than those of which a worldly, grasping, selfish tendency of heart and affections furnish him with the materials. God may justly and wisely deprive men of those seductions which ensnared their souls, and led them to quit the blessings of communion with his Church, in the use of its ordinances, and the example of its holy members. We "*forsake the fountain of living waters, and hew out to ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water:*"[1] and we must perhaps be brought to understand, and loath the folly of our choice, by seeing our outward comforts, as well as the spirituality of our hearts, dried up like the brooks in summer. And when that hour of bereavement comes, it will be well, it will be an exercise of unspeakable mercy in our behalf, if we shall not be

[1] Jerem. ii. 13.

so wedded to our worldly idols, as to think all things lost, when they are removed; and each to say with Micah, when the Danites robbed him of his images, "*Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and what have I more?*" [1]

(2.) *By pitching his tent nigh to Sodom, Lot chose a place, where "he was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked."* [2] The men with whom he sojourned had cast off, not only all sense of virtue, but all sense of ordinary modesty. Pride and fulness of bread made them even glory in their shame. The fearful display of their guilt defied God; and made the burdened land groan in its weariness beneath them. They spread an atmosphere around them, which it was impossible to breathe for a moment without pollution. Lot had the knowledge of God, a sense of the holiness of his nature, the purity of his law, and therefore, of the desperate recklessness, with which these sinners against their own souls were defying and dishonouring the Lord of heaven. He was justified, as a believer in a Saviour to come; and loved in his heart that righteous way of God, which was every moment mocked and

[1] Judges xviii. 24. [2] 2 Peter ii. 7.

scorned by the men of Sodom. If God then was dear to him, how dreadful to see God thus set at nought! If he had taken delight in the words of prayer and praise around Abram's altar, how deep the anguish of hearing that gracious Being, who was the object of this continual supplication and thankgiving, blasphemed day by day!

Holiness, and therefore peace dwelled in Abram's tent: but sin, and therefore misery were with Lot in the tents of Sodom. And what shall be that Christian's state of trial, whose guilty avarice of wealth has led him where he must exchange the language of heaven, uttered by Saints of God around him, for the Shibboleth of hell; for a tone of conversation more befitting what we may imagine to be the interchange of mind among lost and condemned Spirits, than of men under a dispensation of mercy? What shall be the grief of that Christian, whose covetousness hath beguiled him from men who adorned the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things, by lives of exemplary holiness, to sojourn among those who break the commandments of the Most High, as if they mattered not his wrath, and challenged Him to do his worst? Are these the changes into

which the love of money should seduce those who are redeemed from their vain conversation, not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ? Is it thus a Christian must hope, that the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep his heart and mind by Christ Jesus? Is it thus he must expect that holy, near, calm, and undisturbed fellowship with the Father, and the Son, which unites the blessedness of a purer world, with the toils and tears of Christian conflict upon earth?

Either a believer's holy hatred of the awful abominations around him must be diminished, and the heart of the life of God in experimental religion eaten away by the contamination to which he has fastened himself, like a living healthy man to a dead and putrid carcase; or else his soul must be daily vexed and distressed. *Love* must make him mourn over sinners, thus madly destroying themselves, and casting away from them the mighty salvation of God, as a thing of no price. *Zeal* for that God, whose he is, and whom he has vowed to serve, must awaken his grief to see infinite mercy despised, infinite power defied, infinite patience mocked, and the inestimable ransom of the blood of

Christ trampled under foot by men, as they pass in their godless merriment along the highway of Satan, and to the chambers of eternal death. The peace of religion is to be found in the tents of the faithful; but all the best sympathies of a gracious heart, yearning over men for their salvation, will be shocked and goaded to anguish by the contradiction of sinners against the invitations of the Holy Ghost, and the Atonement of the cross. "*O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears; that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*" [1] Thou therefore, O man of God, flee those unhallowed associations; unless indeed his providence shall manifestly appear to lead thee amongst them: and while thou sojournest among these tabernacles of sin, watch and pray that thy soul enter them not, to have communion with the wickedness of those who dwell in them, except it may be to do them good. Plead with God earnestly on their behalf; if peradventure He may bring them to the knowledge of the truth, that they may saved. But "*be not partaker with other men's sins: keep thyself pure.*" [2]

[1] Jerem. ix. 1. [2] 1 Tim. v. 22.

(3.) *Lot was eventually delivered from the snares of Sodom; yet with the loss of all, for which he had ventured to dwell there.* He was surely warned by a providence of no ordinary kind, not to return thither, after the valour of Abram had delivered him from captivity, and rescued his goods, and the women also, and the people. But the warning was lost upon him. His heart was drugged with worldliness; so that his chastisement and deliverance failed, at that time, to arouse him from the spiritual stupefaction into which he had fallen. He went back to Sodom: and even when God declared that he would destroy the place, Lot still lingered, and would have died in his most guilty unwillingness to depart, if the angel of Jehovah had not taken hold of his arm, in unsearchable grace, and said, "*Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.*"[1] He did escape, and found a sure refuge in Zoar; but his wife, his sons-in-law, his property, perished by the fire from heaven. He is now punished, through every one of his former snares. Surely herein is an accumulation of

[1] Gen. xix. 17.

grief, and herein we read, how true it is, that when the Lord takes up the rod, he can make sick in smiting. Lot was a brand, plucked out of the burning, and that only by Abram's prayer. Such too may be the experience of those who imitate the low and carnal views that led him into the vale of Sodom. God, if they are his possession, in the everlasting covenant of love, will at length deliver them; but it *may* be, and it probably *will* be, with a chastisement so stern, and bereavements of outward and inward comforts so mournful, as to bring them down with sorrow, and self-loathing, and with privations of gracious comfort, even to the very grave. If direct and easily interpreted providences appear to lead the servants of God into a land of sin; or if their desire to promote the honour of the Saviour, and the salvation of souls, carry them forth into kingdoms of iniquity;—if they wish there to be witnesses for the Redeemer, and to hold aloft the banner of the cross, calling men to behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, they may expect, that their outward and inward sacrifices and troubles will be counterpoised and recompensed, by peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. But they who leave the guidance of

the cloudy pillar, to share the portion of that good, which the wicked enjoy, even if they should not eventually make absolute shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience, will pierce themselves through with many sorrows.

The greatest historian of antiquity[1] observes, that the barrenness of the soil of Attica preserved it quiet and undisturbed, through the longest space of time, in one uninterrupted series of possessors; while wealthier lands, exposed to foreign attack and civil dissension, were early ruined between both. Even so, Lot's guilty desire to be rich brought him into temptation and a snare: and, had not God interposed, would have cast him into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which would have drowned him in destruction and perdition. His uncle on the other hand was blessed, as manifestly, as Lot was afflicted and scourged. I turn then to consider

(II.) THE PROVIDENCES WHICH BEFEL ABRAM.

That is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation: "*My God is able to supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by*

[1] Thucyd. Book I. Sect. 2.

Christ Jesus."[1] The friend of God had, by anticipation, a most happy and heart-cheering experience of its truth, at the very moment when some especial solace must have been wanting to uphold him.

(1.) *He was immediately favoured by a gracious visit and communication from God.* It is emphatically said to have been vouchsafed, "after that Lot was departed from him." In a similar spirit of tender compensation, the Saviour, long afterwards said to the disciples, whose hearts died within them at the prospect of his approaching departure, "*I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you.*"[2] Abram is now in a barren land; but Jehovah is his portion. The everlasting Word is his Shepherd, he cannot want. John was in the Isle called Patmos, for the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ. But in that solitude he was blessed with the high and glorious visions of the Apocalypse; and saw the Son of God, as He had never been beheld, and as He never shall be seen, until He shall come again in his glory, and all his holy angels with Him. How much more happy, how unmeasurably more

[1] Phil. iv. 9. [2] John xiv. 18.

desirable the peace enjoyed by Abram, through these gracious manifestations made by the Word to his mind in its solitude, than the situation of Lot, amidst all the fertility of the plain of Jordan—even if that plain had been, as some imagined, the very garden of God itself.

Here was balm indeed, to cure the wound made by the selfishness of Lot. Such comfort was needed; and Abram has it in all its preciousness. Lot was no sooner departed, than Jehovah comes in his stead. Personal knowledge of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in Christ Jesus,—personal communion with them, are the best testimonies of the life of God within the soul. Sometimes He comes to comfort it under distresses; sometimes to sanctify its spiritual enjoyments. He is often manifested in the hour of temptation; and his presence is often discoverable, by the consolation and relief unexpectedly brought in the time of need. He comes indeed with such unquestionable evidence, who it is that approaches, and with what amazing tenderness, that the Christian is compelled to cry, "*It is the voice of my beloved;*" "*Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest myself unto me, and not unto the*

world?"[1] He comes in those spiritual discoveries, which give the secret pledge of the approaching and everlasting display of his excellence and his love, when they whom He now visits, to give them songs in the night of their sorrow, shall see Him as He is, and resemble Him in glory. And, come when He may, it is to leave a blessing behind Him. A christian may be in a weary solitude, far from religious friends, far from endearing intercourse with those to whom his heart clings, and is bound, by the strongest and most hallowed ties of earthly affection. He may say, as he sees them depart, "*Ye will leave me alone;*" but it is his high privilege to add, as he sees also the new and living way into the holiest, for communion with God, by the blood of Jesus—"*Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.*"[2] The affinities of nature, and the charities of life may be rent asunder: but the bond which unites him to his Heavenly Father, cannot be broken; and nothing shall separate him—I say not from the love of God—but from the full persuasion of that love, brought into his heart by fellowship with heaven, if he seek, and if he

[1] Cant. v. 2. John xiv. 22. [2] John viii. 16.

spread forth the affections of his heart to enjoy that communion.

Ye who have thus known the Saviour's preciousness, in gracious intercourse with Him by faith, put forth the exercises of that faith, to expect Him at all times, and especially when your trials may abound: and so be persuaded that you will be raised above them, by divine consolations, as the ark above the waters of the deluge, by the hand of God. Thus condescendingly and familiarly walking with you by the way, He will give sweetness to every joy; not only sanctify every sorrow, but deprive it of its sting, and make it unable to cast you down in feebleness of spirit, and sinful mourning before God. Seek Him whom your soul loveth; and you will assuredly find Him, and with him the peace of God.

(2) Abram had in this visit of Jehovah, *a renewal of all the promises, by which his faith had been upheld and strengthened in following God.* Christian trust is continually called to rest upon a promise; but if the manifestations of God to the heart, in his covenant faithfulness, are not often renewed, faith is apt to become feeble, until there seem to be only a handful of meal in the barrel, and a drop of oil in the

cruse. Therefore it is that God unveils his love to his waiting, and almost fainting servants; and saith unto them, "Fear not, I am your salvation." God said to Abraham, "*Lift up thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed, as the dust of the earth, so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it, and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.*" Abram is a man of faith; but he is bidden to lift up his eyes, and look with a larger and closer observation of yet clearer and more heavenly confidence, upon the heritage, in which God had instated him. It is entirely his own: and the more narrowly he examines it, the more will he be smitten with its loveliness; the more effectually carried out of himself, and out of the intermediate sorrows of his pilgrimage, to dwell in that consolation, which is so freely given and so unalienably secured.

If they who believe in the appointed Redeemer, to the saving of the soul, would enter

into and understand the beauty of that house of God, wherein their happy lot is cast, even the Church, built upon its living corner stone, they must not give merely a slight and hasty regard to the general structure, but must enter into its detail, follow its magnificence, from one chamber of beauty to another, and search out what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of the love of Christ which it contains, until they understand it minutely; and hunger and thirst, as becomes the children of light, to be filled with all the fulness of God. "Arise, walk through the land." Abram was to examine it fully; to see its brooks and water-springs; its stones of iron, and its hills, out of which brass might be digged; to know that it was a land flowing with milk and honey, the glory of all lands. And ye, who would not remain strangers to any part of your vast inheritance, the land of exceeding great, precious, and unchangeable promise, be your own spies: and search it out by diligent inquisition. Rest not contented to study it, even in that accurate map afforded you by the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures. But let an experimental religion, enkindled and maintained by the eternal Spirit in your hearts, make you deeply

acquainted with the surface of the field, and the treasure contained in it.

O that Christians knew how much of life, peace, happiness, strength, joy, stability in faith, they lose for want of walking in holy observation through Immanuel's land, that ever-smiling country which He hath died to give them! Of how much glory is He defrauded, by their want of active and practical search into the happiness of their spiritual possession, as He has made it over to them in the everlasting covenant of his love! "*Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces;*" [1] not only to enjoy your own present and eternal portion in their beauty and glory, but to tell them that come after: that they likewise may become followers of you, as ye also are of Christ. Thus survey your goodly heritage in the Church of God; and that which hath been hard to suffer in the trials of life, will become much more tolerable: and very delightful will be the remembrance, when you shall have finally entered the ark, with the saints of Christ at his coming again, and the

[1] Psalm xlviii. 12, 13.

hand of God shall have shut you in, and ye shall go no more out for ever. "*All things are yours, whether of the world, or life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's.*"[1] And is not this an inventory which ye should lift up your eyes to examine, a land of good, which you should arise and walk through, with ever unfatigued, ever new delight?

I. If the distinctions of Abram were great, amidst all his trials, and his communion with God endearing, in those misty and more dim periods of the infancy and non-age of the Church, *how much more blessed the believer's position, when he is called into the Mount Zion of the Gospel prospect, and sees his spiritual portion as there exhibited in the light and lustre of accomplished redemption?* Abram had only a Pisgah view of the true land of promise; even when he walked through the visible Canaan. They who believe, in this noon-day of the Redeemer's manifested love, are privileged to behold what no eye of elder saint had seen, no ear of ancient believer heard, neither had it entered into the heart even of Abram, in

[1] 1 Cor. iii. 22.

the brightest day of divine revelation made to him, fully to conceive. "*God hath provided some better thing for us; that they without us should not be made perfect.*" [1]

But to whom much is given, from them will much be required. If the magnificent prospect of an evangelical heritage dwell brightly in our eye, it should *enlighten* our hearts; it should *fill* our hearts, who feel it to be our own, and make us desire to walk worthy of God, who hath called us to his kingdom and glory.

II. If this portion of the history of Abram has been properly examined, it teaches one plain, obvious, and most momentous lesson, both to the sinner and to the saint:—*That* "*godliness is profitable for all things: having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*" [2] Abram leaves the richer portion for Lot, and is contented with that which is worse: but then Jehovah comes to be his portion, and to satisfy him with the exceeding abundance of mercy and love. Lot's gain lasts but a little time, and then perishes in the fires of Sodom. Abram's part is unchangeable. His comforts are increased, his fame is spread

[1] Heb. xi. 40. [2] Tim. iv. 8.

abroad, and his holy familiarity with God becomes more frequent and more uninterrupted. It will ever thus be found by all true Christian experience. It will assuredly be learned, that Jesus was the faithful and true Witness when He said, "*Every one who hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.*"[1] Arise then, ye who are partakers of Abram's holy faith, and walk through the land of your salvation, in the length and breadth of its present blessedness, as well as of that which shall be imparted, when you shall be no more sojourners, but be made actually possessors of the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. And whensoever you sit down, after this close and active examination of faith, frequently repeated, remember the covenant God of all your mercies. In every plain of Mamre, where you may be providentially called to dwell, set up an altar of praise to Jehovah. Ground it firmly in love; build it high and strong in faith; and enjoy the privilege of communing with God before it, in the experimental life of his grace.

[1] Matt. xix. 29.

SERMON XVII.

ABRAM AND MELCHIZEDEK.

GENESIS XIV. 18—20.

AND MELCHIZEDEK KING OF SALEM BROUGHT FORTH BREAD AND WINE: AND HE WAS THE PRIEST OF THE MOST HIGH GOD. AND HE BLESSED HIM, AND SAID, BLESSED BE ABRAM OF THE MOST HIGH GOD, POSSESSOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH; AND BLESSED BE THE MOST HIGH GOD WHICH HATH DELIVERED THINE ENEMIES INTO THINE HAND. AND HE GAVE HIM TITHES OF ALL.

THE moon revolves around the earth by a law of force fixed and invariable; but is yet seen under a variety of aspects in different points of her orbit. It is thus with a Christian in the world. "*His life is hid with Christ in God,*"[1] "*He is kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.*"[2] But his providential circumstances at one period of his heavenly course, are extremely unlike those, in which he

[1] Col. iii. 3. [2] 1 Peter i. 5.

is at other times placed, according to the will of his Heavenly Father. Yet however greatly they may differ to the eye of sense, they all—and that invariably, work together for his good. The history of Abram may serve to exemplify this remark. We have seen him a stranger, and a man of peace in Canaan; with no other defence than the horns of the altar, which he had erected in faith, and dedicated to the honour of Jehovah. We are now to regard him as a warrior, taking up arms to deliver the oppressed, and to snatch the prey out of the hand of the mighty. Here however, as in former exhibitions of his character, we find him actuated by the same dispositions, and consistent in the holy principles of his conduct. And his example should be followed through all the varieties of Christian experience. If the love of God be shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, there is a happy unity of principle with the will of the Most High, to regulate the sincere disciple in all the contingencies of life, and to preserve him the same man, according to the mind that was in Christ Jesus, "in all time of his tribulation, and in all time of his wealth."

A pregnant instance of this truth will appear,

by noticing, from the chapter now under review,

I. ABRAM'S VICTORY OVER THE CONFEDERATED KINGS.

It does not seem probable, that Lot was actively engaged as a party in this war, by joining the people among whom he dwelt, in their resistance to the invasion of Chedorlaomer. He was not on that account, however, to escape the general injury and violence. The kings of Sodom aud Gomorrah fled, and fell. "*Their goods, and all their victuals were taken. The spoilers also took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.*" [1] No sooner did tidings of this disaster reach Abram, from one who had escaped the slaughter and captivity, than he immediately prepared for the rescue of his kinsman. All the selfishness of Lot is forgotten: his danger alone is remembered: and with the prompt intrepidity of a man, whose life was that of habitual faith and dependance upon God, Abram resolves to follow and give battle to the five kings, with only his domestic servants, trained in his family; and (through the divine blessing) to deliver his nephew.

[1] Gen. xiv. 11, 12.

And wheresoever this gracious confidence upon the Most High is in vigorous exercise, there will its possessor be strong, and do exploits. Faith is a valiant grace. It precipitated Gideon, in the might of God, upon the hosts of Midian, with three hundred men; and gained him a triumph over them. It is the high and animating principle of the believer in his warfare against the principalities and powers of sin. "*This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*"[1] The world, the flesh, and devil are confederated kings; and if they are to be vanquished, the Christian warrior must take to himself "*the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, and the shield of faith whereby he may quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.*"[2] Abram had no might against the great company, which yet he adventured to follow; but his eyes were upon God; and therefore his heart was bold. Jehovah was his Banner; and hence he went forth, conquering and to conquer. The faith that glowed so brightly in his heart was an assurance of victory: and his covenant God amply redeemed the pledge committed to him, together with the grace of this high confidence.

[1] 1 John v. 4. [2] Eph. vi. 16, 17.

Abram is the worthy example of all his spiritual children, the heirs of the same promise. It *may* happen—and alas, how frequently *does* it happen, that some who are dear to the Christian's heart, and cherished by his tenderest love, turn aside to dwell among the tents of ungodliness, and are there made captives by Satan! Shall the adversary then be allowed to carry them away, without blow struck, or effort made for their deliverance? Shall not the soldier of the cross, who hath in his own person fought and foiled the adversary, gird himself for the battle, and go forth, in the name and strength of the Lord of Hosts, to bring back the captive, (as the power of restoring love may bless the effort) to his forsaken rest, and peace, and portion? No offence which an erring brother may have committed—no provocation which he may have given—no selfishness, whereby he may have violated the sanctuary of relative obligation, whatever be its stipulated or general demands, must be for a moment remembered. That brother is in the way of the destroyer: and if we have learned the power of redeeming love, we shall no more hesitate to strive and pray for his deliverance, than did Joseph to help his brethren, and do

them good, after the wrong which he had suffered at their hands. If an example be needful, we find it in the conduct of the Son of God. Man had revolted from Jehovah, and robbed Him of the honour due to all his attributes. Man was a captive, lost and undone, in the hand of his mighty enemy. But then the Redeemer hastened to deliver him: then the Redeemer burst asunder every link of his slavery, in the power of a victorious salvation; and made him free indeed. "*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*"[1]

Abram in this victory shadowed forth the presence and might of our Lord in his church, for the deliverance of its members; when otherwise, being led into temptation and a snare, they would be in danger of widely and awfully departing from God. Abram's conquest of the kings was not only a pledge of that amazing victory, which the Church, in its glorious Head should obtain over the world; but also of its usefulness to the world, whensoever men will admit its help and kindness. "*The remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles, in the midst of many people, as a lion among the*

[1] 1 John iv. 11.

beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep, who if he go through, both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver." [1]

In this victory, attesting so undeniably the help of Him, whose Almightiness breaks the shield, the sword, and the battle of such as oppose the objects of his love, Abram had a pledge and security of regality over the land of Canaan. It was already his own by right of promise; and now he obtains a further seizin, by right of conquest, in connexion with the inviolable truth of God. When Moses, in a later period of the history of redemption, vanquished and slew the Egyptian who smote one of his brethren, he thought that God by his hand would deliver Israel; and he thought rightly. It was the first-fruit of all his victories; the first step that led the armies of God out of the house of their bondage. It may be also the Christian's comfort, and a gracious light of hope within his heart, when he can thank God for giving him the victory over any temptation, that the Head and Captain of his salvation is thus foreshewing to him the destruction of all

[1] Micah v. 8.

his enemies: assuring him that Satan shall be bruised under his feet shortly; and that he shall attain the rest of his everlasting inheritance. Such a soldier of Christ should hail that victory as a pledge of a final triumph. It is the ground on which to erect an Ebenezer, saying, "Hitherto the Lord hath helped me." It is the mount of praise, as well as of prospect, on which he should "thank God and take courage."

The same graceful disinterestedness, whereby the father of the faithful exhibited the holy superiority of his principles, when he yielded the fruitful vale of Sodom to the covetousness of Lot, is again manifested in this great victory. "*The king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself. And Abram said unto him, I have lifted mine hand unto the Lord, the most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread, even to a shoe latchet; (or, from a girl's hair-fillet to a man's shoe-tie) lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich.*"[1] Instances of such generosity are, alas, very rare, even among those who profess to have all things

[1] Gen. xiv. 21—23.

in Christ. Were it otherwise, the religion of a self-denying Saviour would be more abundantly honoured in the world. Would to God, that the heavenly contentedness which a conscious possession of divine and unchangeable love is calculated to produce, were more duly appreciated, and more justly admired! Would to God, that such a holy disregard of the selfish cravings of our poor fallen nature, did more frequently attest the mightiness of that principle, which, assuring the Christian that all things are his, would also attest, not only his calm repose, but his deep delight in those unsearchable riches which the world can neither give nor take away!

We are now conducted by the history to notice,

II. The Patriarch's interview with Melchizedek.

No man can contemplate the wonders of salvation with a spiritual eye, who will not feel his heart's fulness urging him to exclaim, "*Great is the mystery of godliness!*"[1] So many circumstances crowd upon the mind, when it ranges through the plan and history of Re-

[1] 1 Tim. iii. 16.

demption, whether before or after the Eternal Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, that the view is almost overwhelming. And assuredly there were few more profound truths which faith was called to contemplate, among those which pointed forth the Lord of glory, before He assumed our nature, than Melchizedek's visit to Abram. We may in some degree infer the thickness of the veil drawn around this secret and wonderful person, from the conjectures made concerning him, and the arguments whereby they are defended.

Among the Jews it was an almost universal opinion, that he was Shem the son of Noah, who is asserted by such as adopt the short chronology of the Hebrew Pentateuch, to have survived Abram, though born a considerable time before the flood. Of this opinion are many able and learned writers among the great theologians of more modern times, and of the English Church. But this opinion, together with the chronological theory upon which it is founded, appears to be encompassed with almost insuperable difficulties. According to the most approved system of sacred computation, Shem must have died four hundred and forty years before the birth of Abram. The

principal argument, drawn from a declaration in the blessing of Noah, that Canaan should be the servant of Shem, which blessing, Shem, as its depository, is made to repeat in the person of him who is called Melchizedek, is a foundation too narrow for the superstructure. The genealogy of Shem was minutely recorded; while Melchizedek is said to be without father, and without mother, when the great Apostle brings him under the notice of the Hebrew Church. And as Levi, not less than Abram, through whom he came, was descended from Shem, while it is testified of Melchizedek, that his descent was not the same with that of the Aaronic priesthood, this supposition, however ingeniously urged, is untenable.

Some heretics in the early church affirmed, that Melchizedek was the Holy Ghost. But this mysterious character is said to be a priest of the Most High God: and every High Priest is taken from among men. If therefore the Holy Ghost was a Priest unto God, He would therein be inferior to God. Moreover the Holy Ghost never descended from heaven to be incarnate; but only the Son of God. Others again, among whom is the accomplished, but

fanciful Origen, regard him as an angel; but without any measure of convincing proof. By a fourth class, he is thought to have been one of the kings of Canaan, marvellously raised up of God, and gifted with a most peculiar priesthood, for the very purpose, as it would appear, of bestowing a solemn blessing upon Abram, for the confirmation of his faith, and the comfort of his mind. By these commentators, Melchizedek is made an illustrious type of Immanuel, in his Everlasting Priesthood, and in the royalty of his office, as King of Righteousness, and King of Peace. It must be acknowledged, that by far the greatest number of Christian writers in all ages of the church—that divines of all shades of opinion, and all degrees of learning, have adopted the conclusion, that Melchizedek, who came down, as it were from heaven, an insulated being, just flashing upon us a radiance, wherein we discover the Regal and Eternal Priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ brightly represented, and then leaving all dark again, was a man; and only a man; although greatly privileged, as an eminent representative of the Eternal High Priest of our profession.

Such was long, and until lately, my own

view of Abram's wondrous visitant; but subsequent reflection has induced me to adopt the opinion of those who deem him to have been none other than the Angel of the everlasting covenant, manifest in the likeness of man, by a special privilege and dispensation in the patriarch's behalf. The subject is confessedly difficult; and may well demand that the maintainers of different opinions should each hold his own in the bond of peace; since none of the principal hypotheses violate the unity of the Spirit, or impugn any portion of the truth as it is in Jesus. I may be permitted to mention a few of the reasons which have operated on my own mind; and leave them, in dependence on that Spirit which is promised to lead the believer into all truth.[1]

The supposition that Melchizedek was a prince who reigned in Jerusalem, then called Salem, is opposed by a serious *geographical* difficulty. Jerusalem, at that time, and for centuries afterwards, was known by the name of Jebuz: and it would be hard to say, in what satisfactory manner we may account for the

[1] The subject is ably discussed by Cunæus de Republicâ Hebræorum; Biddulph's Theology of the Early Patriarchs; and Faber's Horæ Mosaicæ, to which the reader is referred.

fact how a royal prince, owning Jehovah, and acting as a priest of the Most High God, could dwell amidst these idolaters of Canaan in safety, and all the while be unknown to Abram, who could not be very remote from the seat of his government. Why indeed would there have been a necessity, so to speak, that Abram should be singled out as the depository of the truth of God, and as its dispenser to the peculiar race that was to preserve it from perishing, as afterwards the manna was laid up in the most holy place, so long as Melchizedek was already favoured with the blessing of that knowledge, and privileged to possess it? If however, it be said, with St. Jerome, that Salem was the northern city of that name, identical with Sichem, then almost the first step that Abram took into the promised land, must have been into the very heart of Melchizedek's territory, where he reigned and worshipped God. (Gen. xii. 6.) Yet we hear of no friendship, no acquaintance, no mutual assistance, no reciprocities of kindness between them; notwithstanding the eager desire which the friend of God must have felt to cultivate a sacred intimacy with one so highly honoured of the Most High, as this remarkable man.

That two such characters, so amazingly singled out by a divine hand, from all the rest of the human race, should have been thus placed, and yet thus estranged from each other, from a community of worship, and an interchange of fellowship equally consolatory to themselves, and important to the diffusion of the knowledge of God, is, to say the least, hard to be understood.

Neither is it easy to imagine, from any thing apparent in the sacred record, in what manner the priesthood of Melchizedek, royal as it was, could have been so much more glorious than that of Abram, the friend of God, the heir of the world, the centre of gracious convergency to so many exceeding great and precious promises; and himself also a priest of Jehovah, according to the patriarchal economy;—one who had built an altar to God; who had solemnly called upon his name, and who was afterwards to exhibit himself in the light of a sacerdotal character so awful, in the offering of his son upon mount Moriah.[1] One was the father of the

[1] If the future Jerusalem was the seat of Melchizedek's royalty, Abram must, on his journey to the holy mount, have passed close beneath its walls; and could he have so done, without an attempt to see and converse with his distinguished brother in the priesthood!

faithful, the progenitor of the Messiah, while the other was only an obscure prince of Canaan: and truly if the less be blessed of the better, then would it seem more fitting that Melchizedek should be blessed of Abram, than that he should confer that blessing upon him.

St. Paul, bringing this illustrious personage before the Hebrew Church,[1] and expatiating upon the singular dignity wherewith he was invested, declares that he was "*without father, without mother, without descent, (or pedigree) having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God, abides a priest continually, (to all eternity.*")[2] It is generally understood, that as no record is given of the parentage or genealogy, the birth or death of Melchizedek, he might be said to have none; that as a veil of impenetrable darkness and silence is drawn over these first and last events he was thus, both in person and priesthood, a type of the person and priesthood of Him, "*which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty*"—God in our nature.

But is not this negative mode of dealing with the subject meagre and unsatisfactory?

[1] Heb. vii. 3. [2] εἰς τὸ διηνεκὲς, vide Heb. x. 12.

Allowing—as we must necessarily allow, for the meanness of the type compared with the glory of the antitype, is it possible to acquiesce without a feeling of disappointment in such a mode of exemplifying what St. Paul has said of Christ's eternal priesthood? Shall we be contented with Chrysostom's remark upon this defect of genealogy? He makes it point out a mystery sublime, as distinguished from the carefully recorded pedigrees of the Aaronic priesthood. He bids us not to understand the Scriptures literally, as though Melchizedek had neither father nor mother; but rather as speaking of an extraordinary man; without signifying his beginning, end, line, or race; that so he might the more fully typify the person and excellency of Christ, who, as He was God, was without mother, and without father, as He was man; without beginning of days, because his goings forth have been from of old, even from everlasting; and without end of years, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, an Eternal High Priest of the Church? Can the apostle's description of his Redeemer's sacerdotal character be fulfilled in its length and breadth of meaning, by this vague and negative reference to a mere mortal man? Or must we not rather

at once imagine that he who met Abram, blessed him, and received tithes at his hand, was the Angel of the everlasting covenant, in one of those amazing manifestations which He vouchsafed to the father of the faithful, and repeated at the oak of Mamre? If we admit the divinity of Abram's mysterious host, He is at once without father or mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life. As such, He is made like the Son of God, a previous exhibition of the Lord of glory in our flesh and nature.

But it may be asked, does the Scripture afford any reasonable ground that a king and priest really called Melchizedek ever existed? Moses says that, "Melchizedek, King of Salem, brought forth bread and wine." St. Paul says, that he was by interpretation, king of righteousness, and after that also king of Salem, which is king of peace. There seems no very valid reason, why the original term, (Melechsalem) should be translated, king of Salem, while Melchizedek is left untranslated. It is argued that both, or neither, should have been rendered into English indifferently; and that the verse should have been read, "Melchizedek Melechsalem brought forth bread and

wine;" or else, that "the king of righteousness and king of peace" came thus furnished and provided to meet the patriarch. It is asserted that *Salem* is no more in this place the name of a city than *Zedek*. Why then, it is asked, should St. Paul so anxiously insist upon the meaning of these two proper names? Why should he so decidedly declare that the name of this mysterious being was first by interpretation, king of righteousness; and after that, also king of Salem, which is king of peace? Not, in all probability, because there ever was a prince so named, who reigned in Jerusalem, as the cotemporary of Abram; but because these appellations were descriptive of the Great High Priest's character; even as the Divine Word was named Immanuel; because He was *God with us;* or Jehovah Zedeknu; because in all the momentous work of human justification, He is the Lord our Righteousness: or Sar-Salem, the Prince of Peace; because He hath reconciled us to God by his blood. According to this view, the words of Moses should be rendered "The King of righteousness, even the King of peace, brought forth bread and wine: and He was the priest of the Most High God: and He blessed him, and said, Blessed be

Abram of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth." And this description, which excludes the idea of mere humanity in Him who blessed Abram, is strictly conformable to the reasoning of St. Paul, who makes both titles descriptive and translateable.

David declares of Messiah, "*Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek:*"[1] and this prophetic assertion is repeatedly pressed by St. Paul upon the Hebrews, with the same high and solemn appropriation. He also asserts of the Lord Jesus Christ, that "*because He continueth ever, He hath an unchangeable priesthood.*"[2] That immutability must arise from the eternity of the High Priest; although his sacerdotal office commenced in act only, when the first victim was offered to typify and shadow forth the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. Indeed on the supposition, that a mere man, however exalted in rank and office, met Abram and blessed him, and received tithes from him; the whole reasoning of St. Paul, pressed as it is upon the Church, in language the most sublime and glorious, is exceedingly difficult of interpretation.

[1] Psalm cx. 4. [2] Heb. vii. 24.

But if instead of such a man, we regard the regal priest as the Word of God, that difficulty appears to be very considerably diminished.

But how are we to understand the words, "*after the order,*" and again, "*after the similitude, of Melchizedek?*"[1] Do they not imply difference, and thus destroy the identity of Him, of whom Moses speaks, with God incarnate, as described by St. Paul? It may be answered, that the likeness consists, "not in a difference of persons, but in a sameness of attributes, and is borne out by other expressions of similar meaning. Thus Christ is said to have been "*in the form of God;*"[2] that is, not distinct from Deity; but possessing all his perfections. So, when He "*took upon Him the form of a servant,*"[3] we understand that He became the servant of God, and the minister of mercy to a guilty and dying world. When it is predicated of the Lord Jesus Christ that "*He was made in the likeness of men,*" we must understand the absolute oneness with human nature which He assumed. By parity of reasoning then, it may appear, that the similitude between Melchizedek and the Son of God, concerning which

[1] Heb. vii. 15, 17. [2] Phil. ii. 6. [3] Ib. ii. 7.

St. Paul speaks, consisted in the absolute sameness of their priestly character: and that Christ Himself is a Priest after his own order, which by its very constitution admits only of a single priest. On this ground, Christ and Melchizedek are one Person, and the order of Melchizedek is truly the order of Christ. He, of whom it is witnessed that He liveth, King of righteousness and King of peace, would seem to be identical with Jesus, of whom like mention is made, that He continueth ever the single High Priest of an eternal designation, to whom Abram paid tithes in proof of inferiority: and to whom, when he raised his head from the stone of Bethel, Jacob in after days vowed the tenth of all his substance as an offering, through Him to the Most High God: whose sacerdotal office is the hope and stay of the Church; because He is able to save to the uttermost, all those who come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them: and who shall, in the accomplished period of Jehovah's counsel, come forth from the most holy place above, to bless his worshippers, and to be the substance of his own blessing to them for ever.

But I turn to say a few words upon

III. The conduct of Melchizedek towards Abram.

He was king of peace—that peace which was effected between an insulted God and rebel men, upon the mount of crucifixion. He was also by interpretation, king of righteousness, and thus shadowed forth his great and glorious office, the Lord our Righteousness, the Lord our Peace, because, having brought in an everlasting righteousness by his obedience unto death, and in death, He hath reconciled man to God, making peace by the blood of his cross;—"*made sin for us (while He knew no sin), that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*"[1] The work of this unblemished, this unchangeable righteousness is peace, and its effect, when brought home by faith upon the heart, is quietness and assurance for ever. And the Church of God hath no more ample, no more stable, no more delightful ground of trust and boasting in its Almighty Head, than the great truth thus involved in the Atonement, Intercession, and blessing, of that Great High Priest, who is "*made not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.*"[2]

[1] 2 Cor. v. 21. [2] Heb. vii. 16.

This mysterious personage is represented as a King in dignity, and a Priest of the Most High God in office. Herein He is contradistinguished from all the Aaronic priesthood, to none of whom was royalty ever vouchsafed. And such a High Priest, a Priest upon his throne, became men, whose lost condition, He left his throne of glory to repair, with an everlasting salvation, and to make them kings and priests unto God, "*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people.*"[1] Such a King then governs, such a High Priest is set over the house of God, who can defend it by his Almightiness, and whose infinitely precious mediation, carrying with it the everlasting worth and sweetness of his own all-sufficient oblation, secures answers of mercy from the throne of a reconciled God, and grace to help in time of need; with the happy assurance, that they who seek it in faith, love, holiness, shall be kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.

As a king however, did Melchizedek in an especial manner act, when he brought forth bread and wine, to comfort and invigorate

[1] 1 Peter ii. 9.

Abram, returning from the slaughter of the kings. Thus did Barzillai and his friends, in after days, bring food for David, and for the people that were with him to eat: for they said, "The people is hungry, and thirsty, and weary in the wilderness." And thus in a pre-eminent degree doth the King of Righteousness, even the King of Peace, now fulfilling that office, and of whose coming a shadow was cast before, in this amazing meeting, bring forth spiritual refreshment to those soldiers of the cross who are arrayed in his army of saints, when they would otherwise faint with the toil of their way, and with the severity of their conflict. It does not satisfy his ample love and tender care to give them the victory, and then suffer them to droop and fail, forespent with the battle past, and dreading, lest grace should not be left them for another onset. No: He gives the oil of gladness by his Comforter, to make them of a cheerful countenance; and the wine that He hath mingled, which maketh glad the heart of man; and bread, the staff of life, to strengthen their hearts. In that conflict which the new and living principle of salvation must maintain with inward sinfulness, banded with the principalities and powers of evil—in that

battle which the believer must wage against foes in his own heart, and against the world, the flesh, and the devil without him, he shall be met by his great Redeemer; and to him shall be brought forth by hands of readiest love, that unspeakably reviving banquet, upon which faith delights to feed—the flesh of the Son of Man, which is meat indeed, and his blood, which is drink indeed. The Saviour's honour, name, and glory, are all concerned, not only in the safety, but in the ample sustenance of his militant brethren; not only in preventing the gates of hell from prevailing against them; but in promoting their righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. The bread and wine thus given to Abram by the righteous and peaceful king who met and succoured him, might be regarded as an additional security to Jehovah's promise of the land; even as the grapes of Eshcol were the first fruits of Canaan, to those believing spies who brought them home. In like manner, the joys awaiting the Christian after every successful conflict, in the communications of the Saviour's unchangeable mercy to his soul, will be a foretaste of the hidden manna —of those joys which are at God's right hand for ever, when the redeemed, sanctified, and

glorified members of the Church shall be called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

As a priest, Melchizedek blessed Abram, who had the promises, in the name, and by the especially delegated authority of the Most High God, Possessor of heaven and earth. In that gracious benediction, were shadowed forth the spiritual distinctions bestowed with supreme power, through the ever prevailing priesthood of the Son of God, upon him, and upon all who walk in the steps of his most holy faith. Where He gives not, there can be no substantial blessing, be the other circumstances of life what they may. Where He meets and gives, there is indeed a communication of sustaining, consoling, rejoicing mercy; and concerning the meanest or feeblest of his disciples, doth He say, in the fulness of mediatorial power, as Isaac concerning Jacob, "*I have blessed him; yea, and he shall be blessed.*"[1]

Thus refreshed, distinguished, and blessed, Abram gave to his mysterious host, tithes of all the spoils taken from the enemy in battle. The armour of conquered kings and generals was devoted by warriors, in the world's earlier

[1] Gen. xxvii. 33.

history to the idol whom they especially worshipped, or to the tutelary deity of their country. The honoured head of the Church, in like wise, offered his tenth of the first fruits of battle, and probably of all he had beside, to the King of Righteousness and Peace, thus prefiguring his promised advent to the world, and his stupendous work of mercy in it. These tithes were an offering of gratitude to the Lord; as such they were owned and accepted of Him. And while our high Melchizedek imparts such gracious views of Himself, and fills his confiding followers, in their warfare, with all the fulness of God, in his communications of mercy—while He gives them the rich provision of his constant love, and cries, "*Eat, O my friends, and drink, yea drink abundantly, O my beloved,*" [1] their hearts will expand with thankfulness, (the gift of his Holy Spirit,) for the divine glory, and their own happiness; and they will delight, in the cordial reciprocity of holy gratitude, to give what they have to Him. All they possess is, with themselves, the right of God: in Christ, by creation, by gift, by purchase, and by the conquest of his

[1] Cant. v. 1.

grace. It is therefore fitting that He should possess it all at their hands, as their reasonable service.

But it must not be forgotten, as we contemplate the victory of Abram, and the rescue of Lot, that while the defeated king, and people of Sodom and Gomorrah were thus delivered by the patriarch, it was to them only a *respite* from destruction—the mere holding back of God's outstretched hand, by his own long-suffering and pity. The ruin briefly delayed, fell upon them, with an increased emphasis of wrath and judgment. The fire from heaven very shortly afterwards consumed them: and the waters of the Dead Sea roll their bitterness over a plain once fruitful as the garden of God; while they who once defied God in their pride and fulness of bread, are doomed to suffer the judgment of eternal fire. They are thus examples of those whom God warns, chastens, corrects, and is unwilling to abandon: but who will not turn when He calls, nor repent when He commands; nor believe when the word of salvation is preached to them, in the Atonement of the Lamb of God. Yet a little while, alas, and their day of mercy will be ended, and the morning of judgment will succeed. Consider

then, ye whom, in impenitence and unbelief the solemn truth may concern, that respite is not remission. The *hand* of God will *perform*, what the *word* of God has *threatened* against his enemies: and for the obdurate there can be no escape. "*Turn ye then, turn ye; for why will ye die?*"[1]

[1] Ezekiel xxxiii. 11.

SERMON XVIII.

JUSTIFYING FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS.

GENESIS XV. 6.

HE BELIEVED IN THE LORD, AND HE COUNTED IT TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

THE promises of God, deposited in the ark of his word, are like the manna laid up in the most holy place of the tabernacle, unchangeable and incorruptible. Yet such is the weakness of faith, in those who nevertheless believe on Him to the saving of the soul, that unless these promises are frequently strengthened by new assurances brought home upon the heart, they appear to lose their virtue, like the manna kept until the morning, not in the tabernacle of God, but in the tents of Israel. Such defect in the patient waiting of faith was felt even by Abram himself. The Most High had solemnly engaged to give him a country, a posterity, and a Saviour. But although he was now a conqueror, he had won no place

in Canaan by his victory. Nearly ten years had elapsed, since the assurance of a family was made, and he was yet childless. The last and greatest of all the promises, to which his soul turned, as to its dearest resting-place—the wonderful Deliverer of mankind—gave not even the most distant sign of a future Advent to the world through his posterity. The unbelief that lurked within him appeared therefore in act, when the word of Jehovah came again to him in a vision, saying, "*Fear not Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.*"[1] Abram said, "*Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house, is this Eliezer of Damascus?*" And Abram said, "*Behold to me thou hast given no seed: and lo one born in my house is mine heir.* He seems to fear that divine faithfulness would fail; that God would evade his promise; and that instead of a son, born to him from his own loins, he should merely have an adopted child in this Syrian, who had the care of his household and property. Every year of Sarah's continued barrenness seems to nourish his distrust; and he is not yet brought into that con-

[1] Gen. xv. 1—3.

fidence of faith, whereby "*against hope he believed in hope; that he might be the father of many nations.*"[1] God however condescends to reiterate his assurance, of accomplishing all that He had graciously undertaken. The word of the Lord came unto Abram, saying, "*This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels, shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou art able to number them. And He said unto him, so shall thy seed be.*"[1] The Holy Spirit of promise sealed the faithfulness of God's assurance upon his heart, and his distrust was subdued." "He believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness." "I cannot but observe, that this sighing mournful complaint of Abram hath in it much infirmity, and something of distrust. He shakes in the very bottom of his soul, that improbabilities were growing up, as he thought, to impossibilities against him in the way of promise. Yet hence also mark two things: first, that he doth not repine in himself, and keep up his burning thoughts in his breast; but sweetly

[1] Rom. iv. 18. [2] Gen. xv. 4, 5.

breathes out the burden of his soul into the bosom of his God. "Lord God," saith he, "what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?" It is of sincere faith to unlade our grief into the bosom of our God. Secondly, that God takes not his servant at the advantage of his complaining, and diffidence: but lets that pass; until having renewed the promise to him, and settled his faith, then He gives in his testimony that Abram believes God. The Most High overlooks the weakness, and causeless wailings of his servants, takes them at the best, and then affords them the blessing of his testimony to their faith."[1]

Here, for the first time, the all-momentous doctrine of justification by faith alone, is brought before us, upon the testimony of the Holy Ghost. Here is the germ of that tree of life to the Church—salvation by the imputed righteousness of Christ, beneath which its members have sat, enjoying its refreshing shadow, and finding its fruit sweet to their taste. These rich clusters would never have been disclosed to human imagination in this passage, if the great Gentile Apostle had not held forth the

[1] Owen's Works, XV. 263.

torch of inspiration whereby to discover them. He makes it the copious and comprehensive test of those wondrous discoveries to himself, by the Spirit of truth in Rom. iv. and Gal. iii.; and by him bequeathed, as a legacy of inestimable worth, to men of every time and nation, into whose hands the Scriptures of salvation should be providentially conveyed. He deduces from it the glorious certainty of the righteousness of God without the law—that is, without the merit of works on the part of man,—"*even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe.*"[1] "*Now it was not written for Abram's sake alone, that this righteousness was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.*"[2] And therefore, although I have already dwelt at some length upon faith, as the great impulse of Christian life and holiness; regarding it more immediately as a general affiance in the promises of God, I should be equally wanting towards a proper developement of the character and history of Abraham, and towards the fundamental truth of salvation contained in the

[1] Rom. iii. 22. [2] Rom. iv. 23, 24.

text, were I to omit its consideration, and fail to press it home, as the one thing needful, for the life and peace of the soul in Jesus Christ. My purpose will be answered, if the Spirit's blessing attend the endeavour, by considering

I. THE ESPECIAL OBJECT OF ABRAM'S FAITH.

I have already expressed my persuasion, that the word of the Lord which appeared to him, was that essentially Divine Word, who "*in the beginning was with God, and was God;*"[1] who, in the fulness of appointed time, was made flesh, and dwelt among us. Abram knew Him as such, and addressed to Him that awful title of Jehovah, which it were utter blasphemy to offer to the most glorious being whom the hand of God hath ever created. In Him then, even the Lord our Righteousness, did Abram believe; and it was counted to him for righteousness. This however, as we have seen, was not the first instance in which Abram believed in God: for by faith, when he was called to go out into a place which he should afterwards receive for an inheritance, obeyed, and went out, not knowing whither he went. Yet we have hitherto had no testimony given by the

[1] John i. 1.

Holy Ghost, to his justification, or acceptance before God, as a perfectly righteous man in a forensic sense: nor is his former trust in God exhibited, as an example of justifying faith. Now, as the promises here given are, with small distinctions, only reiterations of those already made, it may be enquired, where lies the difference, between that affiance which led Abram forth from Ur of the Chaldees, and that whereby he is now made the righteousness of God in Christ. The difference lay, not in the nature, not in the vigour, not in the exercise of his faith, but in the *object* to which it was directed, and the centre of rest wherein it dwelt. Heretofore the promises had been general, and mingled together. Here, there is one specific engagement on the part of God to his believing friend,—an engagement involving not merely the assurance of a numerous posterity, as was that which descended from him in the course of nature, but of that glorious seed of the woman, who should spring from him according to the flesh; that union of Godhead with humanity, to be assumed by the second Person in the blessed Trinity, when He should take upon Himself our nature, and die for the world's salvation. To that promise,

and to its wonderful substance, Abram's heart clung, as to its dearest hope, in the sense of sin, and under the deep persuasion, that a Mediator was needed to bear the iniquities of all believers, and to endow them with his own Righteousness, as their sure and inviolable title to eternal life. Thus it was, that Abram rejoiced to see the day of the Son of God, that he saw it and was glad. He saw it, by the eye of faith resting upon that promise, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed:" and having thus beheld the first dawning of this Sun of righteousness which was afterwards to shine over the world with healing in its wings, he was filled with holy joy and rapture, in the faith of its glorious rising. This faith disclosed the day of life, to those who were dead under the sentence of the law, and their own alienation by the reigning power of a carnal mind. It disclosed the day of victory, when the triumphant Lamb of God would destroy the works of the devil, and bring in an everlasting righteousness; when peace should be made between the rebel and his insulted sovereign; when that justice and holiness, which continually demanded vengeance upon sinners, should plead for their reconciliation

with God; because mercy and truth should meet together in Christ, and the propitiation should be made for iniquity; when Immanuel would magnify the law and make it honourable; and the Father who sent Him on that errand, would be well pleased for his righteousness' sake, in doing and suffering for men, and especially, (as the bright centre of the whole system of mercy,) in dying for them the just for the unjust, that He might bring them unto God. Thus Abram saw the Son, and believed on Him, that he might have eternal life. Even as his natural eye beheld the firmament and stars of heaven, when God led him forth from his tent, to consider them, so did the eye of his faith embrace the Messiah to come, and with Him the wonders of salvation, enlightening and glorifying that new heaven and new earth, of which He is to be the beauty and blessedness. That eye of faith looked back upon something of the depths of divine love in the counsels of redemption, before the foundations of the world were laid; it then cast its enraptured glance forward towards the glories of the invisible world, and the wonders of salvation that are within the veil. And look which way it would, Christ was in the prospect, Christ was

all and in all. Abram's faith was simple, his joy was cordial, permanent, glorious, and unspeakable.

The person and works of God in Christ Jesus reconciling the world to Himself, were therefore the great objects of Abram's justifying faith. I do not mean to suggest, that the patriarch was not already a man justified before God; but that the instance of his faith which was thought proper to be selected by the Holy Spirit, as the distinguished model for believing unto righteousness, was that only, wherein immediate respect was had to the Messiah. Christians may believe in God, with reference to all ordinary concerns of life, and such faith may authorize the presumption of their righteousness in the eye of God. But this is not the faith whereby they are justified; which as I have already said, invariably rests on Christ, and is conversant with Him alone, as made unto the believing Church of God, "*Wisdom and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption.*"[1]

(1) Abram's faith unto justification took the first step of that process whereby it reached

[1] 1 Cor. i. 30.

and relied on the Lord our Righteousness in a *conviction of his own sinfulness, and need of mercy, whereby to be provided with another righteousness able to abide the inquisition of a holy God.* He was aware of his own guilt, which deserved the wrath of the Most High, and of the imputation to himself of all the pollution original and actual, under which he lay. He acknowledged, not merely the demerit of such a condition, but its utter helplessness. His mouth was stopped. He had become guilty before God; and owned that there was no other way of deliverance, than that ordained by the wisdom of the Almighty—that the Lord should lay on his incarnate Son the iniquity of the transgressor; which might thus be borne by his surety, and in his stead. A sense of this lost and dreadful condition under the curse and condemnation of the Law is needfully the first exhibition of that faith which is unto salvation. It plumes the wing for the flight of a penitent to the mercy of God in Christ, there to be saved from the wrath to come. "*They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*"[1] They only

[1] Matt. ix. 12.

will flee to lay hold of the hope set before them, who see, by faith, the avenger of blood behind them. To them only, will the widely opened gates of the city of refuge in Abram's Saviour be dear; and they only will escape thither for their lives, as to their place of safety in the munitions of the Rock of ages.

Connected also with this consciousness and conviction of sin, this awful persuasion of being found wanting, when the soul weighs itself in the balances of the sanctuary, is an absolute renunciation of all means within the fallen creature's power to employ on his own behalf, whereby to attain a righteousness which shall be unto eternal life and salvation. This self-despair is an entirely needful ingredient of that faith which God will justly impute unto the believer for righteousness. "*Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains,* which human pride would climb, and whence it would scale heaven, on the footing of reward as of debt.[1] *Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation af Israel.*" Such a faith will make mention of his righteousness only; and will abhor to rest upon pretensions of obedience

[1] Jer. iii. 23.

and holiness; knowing that the "*the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint: that from the head, even to the sole of the foot, there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores:*"[1] and that thus to offer unto that God who chargeth even his angels with folly, and in whose sight not the heavens themselves are pure, would be as under the law, to offer the blind for sacrifice, and the lame, and the sick. The proud self-worshipper who should make an oblation of his own legal obedience for acceptance would be "as if he offered swine's blood; and" he that burned this incense of self-complacency, "as if he blessed an idol." It would be as though our first parents, after the deep and awful guilt of their fall, should have proudly stood before God, and declared that He ought to be amply satisfied with their pains in sewing fig leaves together, to cover them, when He had reproached them for the sin that made them naked, and for the nakedness that had become their shame. They only can fully close with the gracious invitation of redeeming love, "*Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden; and I will give you*

[1] Isa. i. 5.

rest,"[1] who have begun to learn that "the remembrance of sin is grievous unto them, the burden of it intolerable;" and that by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified. They only will desire to "*be found in Christ, not having their own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is by the faith of Christ, the righteousness that is of God by faith.*"[2] To such a renunciation the Redeemer is absolutely needful: otherwise the soul would sink into despair, instead of exercising faith. Such a renunciation therefore, finds at once the grace and mercy of Jehovah a ready resting place and refuge; and there does it repose in the Son of God, as the Ark upon Mount Ararat, when the time of Noah's deliveran ce wasat hand.

(2) Faith unto justification is *the heart's approbation of that method of peace and life which God hath provided for a fallen world in the glorious gospel of his grace.* It beholds there, a representation of his righteousness more bright than could have been reflected from any other mirror—a view of his hatred of sin more dark and dreadful than could have been communicated, save only at the cross of Christ—a

[1] Matt. xi. 28. [2] Phil. iii. 9.

manifestation of his love, in giving his only begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in Him should not perish, but should have eternal life, more beautiful than all the world of providential goodness could ever have embodied to the eye of man. It discovers a glory redounding to Him in the sum and substance, the Alpha and Omega of salvation, God's Son in man's nature, which magnifies his attributes, and secures Him a revenue of honour from redeemed creatures, which could not accrue to Him from the penal condemnation of every sinner that hath been born, or that shall yet live upon the earth, were he condemned to everlasting burnings. For if the honour of a king be the love of his subjects, then, the glory of God the universal Sovereign must be more highly advanced by the reverence of a world submitted to his sway, and joining the hallelujahs of his unfallen angels, than by the despairing curses, by the gnashing of teeth in vain and invincible anguish of a world of sinners, whose hearts would be bound up in rebellion, because they were sentenced to torment beyond the reach of hope.

(3) Faith has its exercise on *the Person of our adorable Saviour*. It sees that glory which

He had with the Father before the world was. It adores Him lying in that Father's bosom, making and preserving the world, the object of God's infinite complacency and delight, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and the one centre of worship, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, to all the powers and hierarchies of heaven. To this mysterious elevation indeed, must faith climb, before it can find a footing for peace: for if the Incarnate Word were merely the Son of Mary, merely of a reasonable soul, and human flesh subsisting, and that flesh not the honoured tabernacle of God Himself, then the Agent and Surety of man's salvation, instead of being able to fulfil his office, and bear the load for which He had engaged, would have sunk beneath it: and the Mediator and the hopes of a ruined world would have been alike crushed by its weight. He would have vainly become the son of man, if He had not been from all eternity the Son of God. He would have been vainly our fellow, if he had not been the Fellow of the Lord of hosts.

Faith too sees the power of the Holy Ghost overshadowing the virgin, and forming that human body within her, in which Deity conde-

scended to dwell. Faith sees that Holy Thing which was born of her, not taking the nature of angels, but taking on Him the nature of Abraham, assuming that body which the Father had prepared for Him; so that therein He might be the fitting Days-Man to lay his hand alike upon the parties between whom He mediated; the hand of his divinity upon the Judge, and the hand of his humanity upon the criminal: making God and the sinner meet together, reconciled once and for ever in Himself.

Faith sees that great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh, Jesus who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet taking upon Him the form of a servant, and being made in fashion as a man, and for a little time lower than the angels, humbling Himself unto death, even the death of the cross, that He might exalt sinners to an elevation of glory with Himself, which "*eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.*"[1] And most assuredly one who has been taught to ask, *What must I do to be saved?*" can never effectually apply to Christ for the great deliverance, except on his

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 9.

mysterious unity of persons. For had He been a mere man, He might well have fallen, as Adam fell: and where then would have been the hope that He should have delivered us from Adam's curse? Had He been only God, He could have performed no obedience to the law; for He would have been, not its subject, but its sovereign. Such a view of the Almighty Justifier of the ungodly had Abram at this period. Therefore had he the power of his Saviour's death in the mortification of his own unbelief, before the Son of God felt the pangs of death upon the cross. Therefore did he rise to a new life by the resurrection of his Lord, before Christ laid his head in the grave. And therefore doth every believer, who looks for mercy at his Redeemer's hand regard Him, as the true fire in the bush at Horeb, God in human nature, not to consume, but to deliver; not to condemn, but to save the world.

(4.) *Faith rests upon the all-sufficient work and offices of Jesus Christ for justification.* It sees Him magnifying the law, and making it honourable by the preciousness and perfection of a sinless obedience, an obedience which indwelling Deity alone could enable its human tabernacle and instrument of holiness to effect.

It witnesses the Mediator of the Covenant, blotting out the handwriting that was against transgressors; nailing it to his cross, removing the defilement and the guilt in his own blood, betrothing our lost nature to Himself—and enabling the least and lowest believer in the Church to say unto his soul, "*Thy Maker is thine Husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name.*" [1] Faith discovers in Him, that exhaustless storehouse of righteousness by his undeviating holiness, from which each believer may take the wedding garment of an absolute justification. It sees Him putting the beauty of his own perfection upon the soul, and presenting it to Himself and to his Father, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but comely in his comeliness, wherewith He enrobes it.

Here however, faith especially regards the PRIESTLY office of our Lord, in cleaving to Him as the Righteousness of all who believe, to the saving of the soul. Were his prophetical or kingly office more especially and exclusively concerned, as the objects of our belief, much less of Him, and much more of ourselves would probably be looked up to, in such a belief: for

[1] Isa. liv. 5.

its essence would be obedience to Him as a Teacher, and submission to Him as a Sovereign, which our fallen nature's pride would construe into merit before God. But man, condemned of God for the guilt of sin, and utterly devoid of all means of providing a righteousness of his own, must contemplate the sacerdotal office of our Lord, as setting forth a propitiation, through faith in his blood. For *Sanctification* we must look especially to the *King* and the *Prophet:* but in the sense of sin, of its cause and defilement, we must contemplate the *High Priest*, Christ and Him crucified, as Israel looked to the brazen serpent in the wilderness." "*By his knowledge*," that is by faith in Him, "*shall my righteous servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities.*"[1]

The Redeemer was thus proposed to the acceptance of fallen man, as the great object of the first promise made in paradise. He was thus proposed to Abel in the blood of his sacrifice; to the patriarchs, and especially to Abram, when he built the altar in Canaan; to the Jews, in all the blood of bulls and of goats, shed according to the institutions of the law. And

[1] Isa. liii. 11.

as the cross sums up, and includes within itself all the other acts and offices of our Redeemer, faith comes to it, as to "*the fountain opened in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness.*"[1] As a Prophet and a King, Christ answered neither the precept, nor the penalty of the Law: as a Priest He fulfilled the one, and amply paid the other with his own atoning sacrifice. And therefore in the sacerdotal office did the Father eternally instate and confirm Him, for the unspeakably great consolation of all who come unto God by Him, saying, "*Thou art a Priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek.*"[2]

When Joseph's brethren stood before him, greatly needing his help, he refused to see their face, except they brought their brother Benjamin with them into his presence. Faith also, as exhibited towards God, is only acceptable, only admitted, if it present the appointed Saviour unto Him. He that thus believeth on the Son, and pleads Him, his person, perfections, undertaking, and accomplishment of mercy, in obedience unto death, hath life; but he that believeth not the Son of God hath not

[1] Zech. xiii. 1. [2] Psalm cx. 4.

life; but the wrath of God abideth on him: and the warning comes from the lips of Him, who must enlighten man's heart by his teaching, as well as cleanse it by his sacrifice, in order to salvation.

The sense, in which Abram's faith was counted to him by the Lord for righteousness, and the doctrine of imputation itself, as stated by St. Paul, must be the subject of another discourse. I only add, that as without faith it is impossible to please God; as without faith no man can come unto the Father; as faith is the only key to unlock the treasure-house of salvation; they who have it not, are without the pale of acceptance, though blessed be God, not yet without the reach of mercy. "*If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.*"[1] "*Lord, we would believe; help Thou our unbelief.*"[2]

[1] John viii. 24. [2] Mark ix. 24.

SERMON XIX.

JUSTIFYING FAITH IN ITS BLESSING.

GENESIS XV. 6.

HE BELIEVED IN THE LORD, AND HE COUNTED IT TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

In studying the lives of eminent men, we enter even into the minute circumstances of their histories with attention: because the least particular concerning them may afford some instruction: but we reserve our main interest for those parts and passages of their conduct or fortunes, which were most important, and from which therefore the most profitable lessons may be derived. According to this rule, while every part of the life of Abram demands attention, there are scenes in it, brought before our eyes by the Holy Ghost, which demand our especial regard. Such in an eminent degree are all those, where he is exhibited, not merely as a

Saint, who adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, but as a representative of the Church of God, and of every member within its pale, to whom, in Him, the exceeding great and precious promises of salvation, are so plainly made, and the unchangeable truth of Jehovah, so deeply pledged for their fulfilment. In his person, the momentous doctrine of justification by the righteousness of a Mediator was fully and clearly preached to the Church: and by him, regarded as that Church's earthly head, appropriated through faith. "*And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen, through faith, preached before the gospel unto him; saying, "In thee shall all nations be blessed." "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.*"[1]

In the last discourse an endeavour was made to exhibit the especial object of Abram's faith, including his sense of mercy needed to him, as a transgressor of the divine law, and utterly hopeless of favour with God, except on the ground of mercy. Abram was shewn, as embracing with the glad and grateful claspings of his heart, that method of salvation which

[1] Gal. iii. 8, 9.

darkly shadowed forth the gospel. His faith was described, as exercising itself upon the mysterious Person, and amazing work of Immanuel,—*The Lord our Righteousness.* It remains now that I should consider the rich heritage and legacy bequeathed by him, as God's appointed earthly instrument of its conveyance, to the Church in

II. The Blessing wherewith his Faith was attended.

"*He believed in the Lord, and He counted it to Him for righteousness.*"

As the doctrine contained in this little sentence is the light and hope of every man, whom the Holy Spirit hath taught to regard himself as a heinous offender against the law, majesty, holiness of the Most High, and yet as a transgressor under a covenant of mercy,—as it leads the heart by the sure, the simple, and the living way, to "*that only name under heaven, given to men, whereby they may be saved,*"[1] I shall endeavour to state the truth concerning it as plainly as possible. And if I shall be humbly instrumental to direct one individual to this Almighty Corner-Stone of salvation, may the

[1] Acts v. 12.

Holy Spirit place that seeker upon it for life and glory everlasting! I inquire then,

(1) WHAT IS MEANT BY JUSTIFICATION, OR BEING ACCOUNTED RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD?

It is a legal term, borrowed from the forms and courts of human judicature, applied to spiritual realities, and to the procedures of the Almighty and holy Judge, regarding the condition wherein every man naturally stands before the bar of divine justice, there to take that awful trial; upon which infinite and everlasting consequences of woe or blessedness must depend. Spiritual and mighty accusers stand by the criminal, to promote the dreadful charge against him. The broken law puts in its righteous plea. Conscience also bears its loud witness, and convicts the offender; who can no more successfully evade the charge, than he can pluck the Judge from his throne. Satan likewise, the accuser of the brethren, stands at his right hand, to resist him. The charge is made good, and laid before the Judge in order that sentence may pass against the offender. But then mercy brings forward its full and triumphant plea in the gospel of unsearchable grace, and the suretyship of Christ. Then the blood of Christ is the ransom paid for deliver-

ance—then the full and inestimable Atonement made by God in human nature is brought before the august tribunal of the Judge—then the everlasting righteousness of Him who in man's stead, and as man's representative, fulfilled every requirement of the law, both the mightiest and the most minute, takes the sinner's part. To this refuge he hastens in his soul's deep earnestness, to be justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. To make the plea against judgment, and the mighty argument for acquittal incontrovertible, the penitent thus visited in the sovereignty of mercy hath an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, who offers the all-sufficient propitiation for sin. Then follows the welcome sentence of absolution by the ransom, and the righteousness of the Mediator; and with it, acceptance with the Most High, and a portion in the inconceivable and everlasting blessings of his paternal love.

There is a difference between the pardon of sin, and justification before God; and they must not be confounded together. Remission of sins is an act of divine grace; but the righteousness of a believer, arising out of the satis-

faction made by God in human nature on his behalf, and in his stead, is an act of justice on the part of the Almighty, due to the unsinning fulfilment of the Law by the perfect Mediator between Him and man. Pardon dismisses the charge of treason against the rebel: Justification invests him with a title to the Sovereign's love, according to the law of that Sovereign's appointment, and to an inheritance in his kingdom and its glory. When Joshua the High Priest in Zechariah's vision,[1] had the filthy garments wherein he stood before the angel removed, the act was a fitting and most vivid emblem of the removal of the guilt of sin, with the tremendous consequences awaiting its charge against the transgressor. But as this removal was only half the work of mercy—as he was afterwards clothed with a change of raiment, typifying the righteousness and full satisfaction made by the Incarnate Son of God, we are taught the preciousness of that righteousness which is *unto* all them that believe in the offers of the gospel, and *upon* them in its appropriation, by the faith which is of the operation of God. In *pardon* the believer is freed

[1] Zech. ii. 4, 5.

from condemnation: in *justification* he has a covenant right to all the joys of that kingdom, of which his Saviour is the glorified Administrator.

Now the justification of Abram, and consequently the justification of any believer may by no possibility depend upon his obedience to the law. Abram's actions were surely works of righteousness performed in faith, and love to God, performed through the Almighty help of the Holy Ghost; and required of him, and of all, according to the covenant of mercy. Yet were they expressly excluded from his justification—even as are those of every man who is yet "*created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that he should walk in.*"[1] "*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, God hath saved us.*"[2] This argument the Apostle triumphantly upholds and makes good in the instance of Abraham. "*If he were justified by works, he had whereof to glory; but not before God. But what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. Now to him*

[1] Eph. ii. 10. [2] Titus iii. 5.

that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness." [1]

Abram's faith was by the judgment of Jehovah counted, or imputed to him for righteousness. To impute sin to any one is to lay it to his charge, and to deal with him, or with his surety, (as the case may be,) according to the desert of sin. This judgment Shimei deprecated, when he cried unto David concerning his insult and rebellion, "*Let not my Lord impute iniquity unto me; neither do thou remember what thy servant did perversely: for thy servant doth know that I have sinned.*"[2] But the imputation wherewith we are concerned in this inestimable example of Abram, is of two kinds, entirely different from each other. It exhibits the Lamb of God taking upon Himself, according to the Father's purpose, and his own infinitely compassionate agreement, the sins of us all, which otherwise never could have been his own, because of his essential and spotless holiness: and giving in

[1] Rom. iv. 2—5. [2] 2 Sam. xix. 19, 20.

their stead his own perfect obedience; so that if we believe, we are made the righteousness of God in Him. Thus Paul undertook the injuries and loss which Philemon might have suffered from his slave Onesimus. "*If he have wronged thee, or oweth thee aught, set that to mine account. I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it.*"[1] Thus Judah said unto Israel concerning Benjamin, "*Send the lad with me; I will be surety for him: of my hand shalt thou require him. If I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever.*"[2] Our own sin is most righteously imputed unto us, cleaves to us, with a power and closeness, from which, in our own might, there is no escape: but the righteousness of Christ belongs not to us, except as the decree of God hath made it over to them that believe. The sin of all is laid on Christ; as the iniquities of Israel on the head of the scape goat. But that ordinance of the law could impart no righteousness. What was negative in the type is graciously brought in positive appropriation before the Church, for the rich consolation of every member it contains,

[1] Philemon 18, 19. [2] Gen. xliii. 9.

of every lively stone in that temple which God will inhabit and glorify to all eternity. Our sin is imputed to the Mediator, that He might atone for it, destroy it, and remove it from the sight of the Judge for ever. The righteousness of Christ on the other hand is imputed to all believers, that it may abide with them, and everlastingly change their state and relation to God, not merely from condemnation to acquittal, but to adoption, and to all the blessings flowing from it, as the unfailing well-head of their supply. Man's sin, from which the spotless Lamb of God was essentially and absolutely free, was by divine appointment transferred to the Surety; as though He were guilty; in order that the righteousness vested in Him, of which man was utterly destitute, might be attributed to man, appealing by faith to his appointed Bondman; as though the real offender were blameless and innocent. He was made sin, as really, with reference *to substitution*, as if He had committed every iniquity, whereby God hath been dishonoured by men; and believers in Him are made righteous, as though they had never offended.

And never must it be forgotten, for the peace and joy of true Christians, that this mutual

substitution comes in virtue of the Church's membership and union with its glorified Head. If there had been no union of our race with Adam, his sin could have no more been imputed to us, than if the offence had been committed by an angel; or than the dreadful guilt of the fallen angels can be laid to our charge. Even, so, unless we have union with Christ, what He hath done and suffered, and all the mightiness of its sum of merit can never rest upon us for favour and happiness, at the hand of God. "*If one died for all, then were all dead.*"[1] Why? Because every baptized believer, as a member of the Lord's body, of his flesh, and of his bones, has been therefore crucified with Him, and has risen with Him. It is thus, as though the same wrath which He endured, had been endured by every real Christian, as one with Him: and the full legal acquittance given to Him by the Father, had been by the self-same act communicated to those who are one with Him by faith. And therefore, as the highest distinction arising out of this oneness, doth the Apostle address his brethren of Corinth, "*Of him are ye in Christ Jesus; who of God is made*

[1] 2 Cor. v. 14.

unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."[1] "*O the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and goodness of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*"[2]

(II.) A few words must now suffice to remark, IN WHAT MANNER ABRAM'S FAITH WAS COUNTED, OR IMPUTED UNTO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Faith itself could not, assuredly be, either wholly or partially, the actual cause of justification. *Not wholly;* for then the amazing work of redeeming love, in obedience and sacrifice would have been altogether superseded. *Not partially;* for then our glorious Immanuel, with all his unsinning legal righteousness, would have been a mere supplement, to compensate for some deficiency in creature duties. Faith, on either supposition, must have been regarded as a work wrought by man for God; rather than as a grace implanted in man by the Almighty hand of the Spirit. It would have been an offering to God, instead of a portion of that sanctification which God promises in his gospel,

[1] 1 Cor. i. 30. [2] Rom. xi. 33.

and gives in his Son.[1] Faith is neither the obedience nor the blood of Christ: and therefore in strictness of language can neither give pardon, nor be imputed for righteousness, which that blood and that obedience can alone convey, according to the provisions of the covenant of grace. The righteousness of God imputed unto us, is the righteousness of God by faith: and therefore faith itself and absolutely cannot be that righteousness. It is wholly excluded by the very doctrine of a gratuitous salvation, from being the efficient, or the moving, or the meritorious cause of justification. It is itself imper-

[1] "This faith, this believing, was imputed unto Abraham for righteousness. Not that his faith was, by a gracious estimation, accounted by God in the room of perfect obedience, which the covenant of works required: but that by his faith he laid hold on, and spiritually united or appropriated to himself the promised seed; by virtue of which union all the righteousness of that seed was reputed to be his righteousness. Thus in the book of God's account his blessings are written on one page, as so many talents bestowed upon men: and the sins of men, not rendering to Him the thanks due for his benefits are so many debts: and lastly, the condemnatory sentence, by which they are declared guilty of eternal death. But as man's righteousness could not stand on the other page, the satisfaction and merits of Christ for believers are inscribed; and likewise their faith, as the gratuitous gift of God, and that by which they are united to Christ, and become partakers of all his righteousness. Thus faith is imputed for righteousness."—Witsius' Economy of the Covenants. Vol. ii. p. 158.

fect, intimately and inseparably defiled by sin; and therefore utterly unable to make atonement, or provide a righteousness. It needs itself to be washed in the pure laver of the Redeemer's Atonement; how then can it be the substitute of that Atonement? It needs the obedience of the Son of Man to make it perfect; how then can it come before God, in the stead of that holiness? If Abram's mere faith might have been counted to him for righteousness, or if a like belief in any of his spiritual posterity might be so imputed, then why not any other good deeds of man's performance? The spiritual view enjoyed by the patriarch, so long before his Saviour's incarnation, beheld Him as the unsinning and perfect righteousness of his church. "*He was fully persuaded that what God had promised, He was able to perform: and therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now*, adds the Holy Ghost, *it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him who raised up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead.*"[1] What shall be imputed? Surely not the faith of

[1] Rom. iv. 21—24.

Abram, which was so far from the possibility of justifying the Church of God that it could not deliver himself, nor make him righteous. The righteousness of Christ then, is to be imputed to us, if we so believe: and thus only can we stand before God in peace, and blameless. Therefore did the Apostle, in the abundance of heavenly wisdom, taught him by the Holy Ghost, desire to be found in his Lord—in happy mystical union with Him; "*not having his own righteousness which was of the law, but that which was through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which was of God by faith.*"[1]

Here, however, it will be asked—and the question must needs be answered, 'In what manner is the faith of every believer, like that of Abram, counted to him by God for righteousness?'

When the sacrifice was offered under the law, the sinner's consent to the way of appointed mercy was testified by laying his hand upon the victim's head; intimating his union with it, and therefore his desire and expectation of that blessing of pardon and acceptance, which the offering was typically intended to provide.

[1] Phil. iii. 9.

Even so it is, in the matter of that great oblation, wherein "*God hath made Him to be sin who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*"[1] The believer coming to the all-prevailing sin-offering, renounces himself, embraces the Saviour, in his obedience and death, as the glorious choice of the Father for his salvation, in whom he, as well as that Father is well pleased: and thus the Redeemer and the sinner are one, for the otherwise lost creature's peace, justification, and adoption into the family of God. Then follows the gracious interchange, whereof I have already spoken—the righteousness of God to the believer; and his sins to his substitute and surety in the covenant. Faith is the eye and hand of the soul, wherewith it sees, and reaches forth unto, and embraces the great Mediator—grasps Him as a sacrifice for guilt, and leans on Him for that imputed righteousness, which God the Father will surely accept, because it is his own gracious appointment. Faith cleaves to the way of escape provided; and thus instates him, in whose heart it has been wrought, in all the merit of the inestimably precious bondsman

[1] 2 Cor. v. 21.

who hath undertaken to satisfy infinite holiness, and save the infinitely guilty and sinful objects of that otherwise consuming justice. To be justified therefore by faith, is exactly to be justified by the obedience of Christ. It is not the grace wherein we stand; but that whereby we have access to it. It is the band of the soul's union to the Mediator: and that union thus effected, the streams and channels are opened, whereby all the blessings of redemption flow into, and refresh the soul. And thus, "*as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*"[1] "*Blessed are the people, that know the joyful sound of this salvation, they shall walk in the light of God's countenance; in their Saviour's name shall they rejoice all the day, and in his righteousness shall they be exalted.*"[2] They shall be raised above the covenant of works, which worketh death; above all the accusations of Satan, of sin, of conscience, of the Law: for who shall lay any thing to their charge—it is God that justifieth? O that our hearts may respond to the gospel call made to them, that we may flee

[1] Rom. v. 19. [2] Psalm lxxxix. 15, 16.

to this Almighty and unfading hope: that as in the Lord Jesus alone we can be justified, so in Him alone we may glory!

Time compels me to omit many of the minor parts of this great argument, especially the Apostle's assurance, that justification by faith embraces the uncircumcision, as well as the circumcision, the Jew as well as the Gentile. But a spiritual perception will easily make the reference from the words of St. Paul. (Rom. iv. 9—16.) May the teaching of the Eternal Spirit enkindle this gracious power of understanding in all our hearts, and make us all evermore to rejoice in its holy comfort!

I observe then, that justification by faith, the warp of that precious robe of mercy which is woven in the gospel loom, provides in an especial manner for two great ends, very near to the heart of God, who is jealous as well as merciful.

(I.) *It provides in the most ample mode and degree for the advancement of his own honour; the high and glorious end for which, we and all things are and were created.* Are the riches of his mercy to be magnified? Is the treasure of divine love to be opened in the gospel, and exhibited to the admiration of redeemed men?

God doth it most effectually, in making a race of restored transgressors, once far alienated from Him, and hating Him for his very perfections, accepted in the Beloved, to the praise of the glory of his grace.

Must the fountains of his wisdom be opened, and their clearness, not less than their unfathomable depths disclosed? Jesus is the water of life: and salvation through faith in his name is the amazing method, whereby "*unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.*" [1] Human intellect, angelic imagination must have been for ever unable to exhibit Jehovah thus to the eyes of all in heaven, and all on earth: but in Him do we hear the full harmony of that angelic song, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.*" [2] And if a scheme of salvation so transcendently wise and beautiful, be eminently fitted to exalt the wisdom and grace of God the Father, shall it not magnify equally in the esteem of all who have learned its price and worth, the glory of Him by whom it was effected in righteousness of obedience, abso-

[1] Eph. iii. 10. [2] Luke ii. 14.

lutely perfect, and in the sufferance of a penalty for the world's sin, infinitely intense? All the glory of saving men from endless guilt and misery, and of raising them to an equally enduring state of blessedness, centres in the incarnate Son of God, for that is his alone and unaided work. And thus did He on earth, and does now in heaven present them to the Father as the travail of his soul, saying, "*All mine are thine, and all thine are mine, and I am glorified in them.*" I call upon you therefore, who have experienced this love of Jesus—upon you, who are washed, sanctified, and justified in his name and by the Spirit of our God, to lift up the thankful melody of your hearts in praise, "*to Him who hath loved you, and washed you from your sins in his own blood, and hath made you kings and priests unto God and his Father,*"[1] a royalty never to be attained; a priesthood never to be abolished.

II. Justification by faith eminently provides for that end, without which all would be in vain,—*The holiness of those who believe to the salvation of the soul.*[2] If we are made partakers of this imputed righteousness, which is the

[1] Rev. i. 5, 6. [2] 1 Pet. i. 9.

Christian robe of acceptance, and diadem of glory, we shall be zealous after practical righteousness. If the king's daughter be clothed with raiment made of wrought gold, to be beautiful in her Bridegroom's eye, by his righteousness, she will be all glorious within, by the work of a gracious sanctification. We shall remember *who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*[1] There can be no personal righteousness, in the eye and estimation of God, before justification, for it is wholly the obedience of faith. But if any man has put on the Lord Jesus Christ, he will "*make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil it in the lusts thereof.*"[2] It is utterly impossible that justifying faith should be unattended with love. From the sides of the true gospel altar of a suffering Redeemer, must flow that river of the water of life, which heals the dead sea of the soul's corruption, whereinto it flows. We love Him because He first loved us: and love is the fulfilling of the law. Embracing salvation, in the person and work of the adorable Surety of sinners, the

[1] Titus ii. 14. [2] Rom. xiii. 14.

Christian hath those exceeding great and precious promises, of which that Surety is also the substance and beauty, and worth; and they are given to him, in order that he may be made partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruptions that are in the world through lust. The very acceptance of Christ in his priestly office, making Atonement for sin, and fulfilling the law of God by his perfect obedience unto death, secures holiness of heart and life in his true disciples. The faith that justifies the sinner, destroys sin; and the heart is purified unto holiness. Here is the great glory of the gospel of our redemption; and here the great test, whether we are believers or infidels. If the latter, then we are living according to the course of this world; and if the former, then have we begun "*to reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God,* in holiness *through Jesus Christ our Lord.*"[1]

[1] Rom. vi. 11.

SERMON XX.

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAM.

GENESIS XV. 17, 18.

IT CAME TO PASS, THAT, WHEN THE SUN WENT DOWN, AND IT WAS DARK, BEHOLD A SMOKING FURNACE, AND A BURNING LAMP, THAT PASSED BETWEEN THOSE PIECES. IN THE SAME DAY, THE LORD MADE A COVENANT WITH ABRAM.

IT is well known in cases of bodily indisposition, that a remedy long continued, frequently loses much of its effect; and must be remitted for a time, or applied in larger quantities, or mingled with some other medicine which may increase its energy. Something similar to this state of things may be observed in the experience of others, who yet, like the father of the faithful, live, not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. The promise of a country, a posterity, and a Saviour, were repeatedly given to him. He embraced it with all his heart: but his trust

had a natural tendency to grow feeble: and as years passed on, with nothing more than reiterated declarations, though proceeding from the God of truth, his heart seemed at length to loosen its hold of simple dependence, and to be almost falling into doubt, and into the grave of comfort which doubt opens to the mind. In this chapter, although upon a new assurance, simply and exclusively directing his faith to the future incarnation of the Word, *he believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness*:" [1] yet when Jehovah declares the purpose of bringing him out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give him the land of Canaan, he asks a sign from heaven, whereupon his confidence may lean, as something, so to speak, palpable for its support. "*He said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?*"[2] A gracious answer, exhibiting the infinite condescension of the Most High, is immediately vouchsafed. He is commanded to make a sacrifice, and God enters into, and establishes a covenant with him, and with his seed for ever.

In this memorable transaction we possess, as it were the rudiments and sketch of that

[1] Gen. xv. 6. [2] Gen. xv. 8.

dispensation of sovereign mercy, wherein it hath pleased God to deal with men, as sinners, and to place before them a salvation, claiming to be received with adoring gratitude; a salvation which it will be their eternal ruin and misery to despise and refuse. I propose therefore to examine

I. The contracting parties in this Covenant.

II. The manner of making it.

III. The subjects which it involved.

I. A covenant is an agreement between persons or parties, for some common end, which may be pleasing or advantageous to both; involving conditions voluntarily assented to by them, and to which they bind themselves by solemn obligations. 'When we speak however, of a covenant of God with men, an important difference must be observed. There is no natural equality between the parties, nor independence of one upon the other; and therefore no mutual adjustment of terms may take place, between them. God wills; and men must obey. But his revealed mind and purpose is called a covenant; because, *as respects God*, He has no rule of action but his own will, yet is pleased hereby to bind Him-

self in his dealings with men, to the observance of specified terms. *As respects men*, they are bound to fulfil the conditions prescribed in the covenant, under pain of forfeiting its offered benefits, and incurring its attendant penalties.'[1] In that covenant originally made with Adam, known by the name of the covenant of works, the two parties, Jehovah and his creature, were in entire harmony with each other: and consequently had no mediator between them. Adam undertook to serve God in absolute purity; unto which he was enabled, being created in his Maker's perfect image; and blessings were promised to his obedience. That condition, "*Do this and live*,"[2] still holds good to those who choose, in the sad delusion of their hearts, to stand before God on the ground of their own merit: but who,—as man's sinful nature hath made a sinless obedience—the only one which a perfectly holy God can accept, impossible, seal their own condemnation, and wilfully abide under the sentence of the righteous Judge for their violation of the covenant of works.

Where the parties are at strife with each

[1] Goode on the Better Covenant. p. 5. See also Witsius, Vol. I. pp. 23—25.

[2] Luke x. 28.

other, and the covenant is to be made, a mediator must be employed, who can undertake the common cause, so as to secure the interest of each, and to bring them into union for the advantage or happiness of both. Such was the covenant made between God and his creatures, lost and ruined by sin, through that great Day's man of his own providing—the "*one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.*"[1] He was the Mediator of the New and better Covenant. *He was the Seed of the woman promised in paradise to bruise the serpent's head*[2]—the Seed of Abraham engaged to be the blessing of all the families of the earth. He was that glorious Mediator, of whom Moses was the type, when Israel stood around the base of Sinai, forbidden by God to touch its flaming terrors: and themselves, overwhelmed with dread, beseeching Moses to go and hear the word of the Lord on their behalf,—while God on the other hand, had allowed and appointed him to stand between Himself and his people, lest they died. By this common Mediator has that everlasting covenant of grace, ordered in all things and

[1] 1 Tim. ii. 5. [2] Gen. iii. 15.

sure, been made between God and man, of which the covenant entered into with Abram gives the significant and instructive outline. It must not be considered as a mere personal dealing between Jehovah, and the father of the faithful. Abram stands not upon the ground of abstract reciprocity with God, nor makes an immediate agreement with Him to the exclusion of his posterity, in this transaction. He is rather in this momentous portion of his history, to be regarded in *a federal capacity*, and as representing his seed; as Adam was the federal head of his whole race—the representative father of all the families of the earth, who fell under the sentence of eternal death, by his most guilty transgression. In this point of view therefore, Abram stands before the Church as an eminent type of the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Abraham, the spiritual and everlasting Father of that posterity, which should be born to Him, as the travail of his soul, like dew-drops from the womb of the morning. The Word of the Lord who appeared unto Abram in this mysterious visit, was the glorious Mediator between God and the patriarch, thus figuratively appearing as a party in this most beautiful exhibition of God's unsearchable grace to sinners.

The contracting parties are, on the side of heaven, God; whether personally considered as the Father, the first Person in the glorious Trinity, or God essentially considered in his Trinity of persons; (for divines are not agreed between these opinions:) and Abram in his representative character on the other,—the type, as I said, of Christ, in his mystical body. In the first covenant, God contracted with man, as a friend,—but now as an enemy: all being gone aside, all together become filthy, none doing good, no not one: yet still as an enemy admitted to an entire amnesty and reconciliation. This agreement therefore is for peace unto those who had been, and are, impiously and hopelessly at war with heaven. It is struck between a God of justice, who will magnify his Law and make it honourable, unto whom it was absolutely and for ever impossible to shew mercy to sinners, in prejudice of his assented holiness,—and those by whom that justice had been outraged, as represented in Jesus Christ. A guilty world must have died without a hope of salvation, unless a sufficient surety could be provided, who should undertake, upon God's own terms, which must be those of infinite and spotless holiness, to save them,

as they lay crushed beneath the broken law of God, and the covenant of works, made with their yet unfallen parent.

Who then undertakes the cause of men, thus ruined and undone? Even the eternal Son of God—even He who could alone present them perfect in Himself, and with Himself to the Father, and say, "*Behold I, and the children whom the Lord hath given me.*"[1] As the first Adam had an office of *representation* in the covenant of works, so hath the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, in the covenant of grace and mercy. The promises were made to Him as the Head and Surety of all future believers. "*He saith not, And to seeds as of many; but as of one; and unto thy seed, which is Christ.*'[2] Even so the promise, not of an earthly Canaan, as in the first instance to Abram, was made to the adorable Mediator between God and sinners, but of a heavenly inheritance —even that eternal life which God who cannot lie, promised before the world began, and promised therefore to his Son, before our guilty race which He had undertaken to save was called into being. Of this Covenant, He is

[1] Isaiah viii. 18. [2] Gal. iii. 16.

on man's behalf the all-sufficient, the Almighty Surety—no other peace-maker having been appointed in the counsels of everlasting wisdom—none else fitted for the momentous office—none else designed, or ever intended to be accepted for its discharge—none else able to effect the reconciliation absolutely required. And why? Because none else is endowed with power to interpose a defence between us, and the wrath of God against us, by taking that burden upon himself, and bearing it away for ever, amidst the agonies of the cross: because none else could be the Priest, to offer, the worthy Victim, for an oblation, or the acceptable Intercessor, to plead the completeness of the sacrifice, and the consequent satisfaction of God, before the throne of appeased and glorified justice and holiness in heaven.

Every age and country of the world has teemed with wonders, natural, intellectual, or moral. Arts, sciences, and inventions, have been enlarged and multiplied; and many of them vastly important to the present comfort and advantage of man. The bounds of learning have been extended, until they now embrace a circumference that sometimes commands a blind, and unthinking wonder. But never in the history of

heaven or earth was a page, so stupendously momentous to immortal creatures revealed to our eyes, as that which the Most High God has vouchsafed to publish, by bringing before us in his own divine word the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. Are we permitting ourselves to disregard it? Are we allowing God in Christ Jesus, reconciling the world to Himself, to solicit our attention and our hearts in vain, while our minds are occupied by the perishing trifles, from which death will soon separate us for ever? Then are we like children delighting in the toy which will be lost, or broken, or despised, before the evening come; instead of being like men, whose faculties are enlarged to know their true interest, and their hearts on fire to obtain it. If we will not take our portion in this covenant, we must have it in another, even the tremendous condemnation of the covenant of works. "*He that believeth not is condemned already*,"[1]—condemned by that law which he cannot keep, and by that glorious gospel of love which he will not accept.

II. Some facts are recorded in THE MANNER

[1] John iii. 18.

OF MAKING THIS COVENANT that require our attention.

God said to Abram, "*Take me a heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds he divided not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcase, Abram drove them away.*[1] It is remarkable that every one of these materials for sacrifice was such as God commanded in the law made four hundred and thirty years after this eventful period. As therefore the *blood of bulls and of goats* was shed under the typical dispensation of the law, "*to sanctify* by its sprinkling *to the purifying of the flesh*," so did this slain and sacrificed oblation shadow forth *the blood of Him who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, that He might purge our consciences from dead works to serve the living God.*"[2] These animals, which had in all probability bled on the patriarchal altars from the beginning, were types of the offering of the

[1] Gen. xv. 9—11. [2] Heb. ix. 13, 14.

body of Jesus Christ once for all—a link in the long chain of testimonies, from Abel's altar, to that whereupon the Lamb of God was slain, "that *without the shedding of blood there is no remission.*" [1]

Indeed the correspondence continually appearing between the sacred rites of the patriarchal religion, and the ceremonies enjoined under the legal dispensation of Sinai, affords us the strongest presumption, that a revealed directory must have existed for the regulation of divine worship, from the beginning of the world. How else shall we avoid the supposition, that the patriarchs, approaching God with sacrificial blood, did not commit the transgression of using that "will worship" which He absolutely condemns? In fact, the same word is used to signify both the covenant itself, and the sacrifice wherewith it was ratified: in testimony, as I have already observed, that sin and sinfulness, being of necessity supposed on the part of man, the death of a substitute was necessary to remove the offence from man, and reconcile him with God.[2] To that blood, not only shed on our behalf on the cross, but

[1] Heb. ix. 22.

[1] Exod. xxiv. 8. Psalm l. 5. Isaiah xlii. 6. xlix. 8. Zech. ix. 11.

sprinkled upon our souls by faith, must we appeal from the stern and unyielding decisions of the law, if we would have peace with heaven, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. No one might ever venture to come into Jehovah's presence without that new and living way into the holiest, even by the blood of Jesus, for had he been *willing* so to do, the law would have thrust him back, even to death. But now the great sacrifice, thus shadowed forth, pleading his unsearchably precious oblation, is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him; and his faithfulness is as unbounded as his ability.[1] This remarkable ceremony of dividing victims, previously slain in sacrifice, and making the stipulating parties pass between the different portions of the bodies, was commonly practised in the earlier ages of the world, as profane histories inform us. It doubtless had its origin in that perverted view of divine truth, which men took, when they saw it through the dark medium of superstitious tradition. And we have a similar allusion made by Jeremiah, to a circumstance not mentioned in any of the historical books of the Old Tes-

[1] Biddulph's Theology of the Patriarchs, II. 178.

tament. "*I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant, which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof, I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life.*"[1] In all cases the parties appear to have passed between the divided portions; as though it were to acknowledge their desert of punishment if they broke the league thus solemnly established. Or rather, as contrasting the covenanter with the dead sacrifice, to suppose him saying—As I live it shall be thus.[2]

But what was the case in this wonderful transaction? "*When the sun went down and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burn-*

[1] Jer. xxxiv. 18. 1 Sam. xi. 7

[2] By cutting the animals asunder, was denoted that in the same manner the perjured, and covenant breakers should be cut asunder by the vengeance of God. An ancient form of these execrations is extant in Livy. "The Roman people do not first break these conditions: but if they should avowedly, and through treachery break them, do thou, O Jupiter, on that day, thus strike the Roman people, as I now strike this hog: and be the stroke the heavier, as thy power is the greater." By the ceremony of confederates passing between the parts cut asunder, was signified, that being now united by the strictest ties of religion, and by a solemn oath, they formed but one body.

ing lamp, (or a lamp of fire) that passed between these pieces."[1] This solemn appearance was the common emblem of Jehovah's presence. "*He went before his people in a pillar of cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night,*"[2] not two, but one and indivisibly the same. "*Mount Sinai was altogether in a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace.*"[3] Such an appearance was the Shekinah, which rested between the cherubim, over the mercy seat of the ark. This glorious symbol of the divine presence passed between the divisions of Abram's sacrifice, to ratify the solemn covenant. Jehovah—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, thus represented, bound Himself by a new obligation to fulfil all his promises; and most especially those which secured the coming and office of Jesus Christ for the world's salvation.

The natural darkness, and the horror of great darkness which in his deep sleep fell upon the friend of God, signified, not merely the afflictions awaiting his posterity in Egypt, the house of their bondage: but in a spiritual and especial manner, the terrors of the wrath im-

[1] Gen. xv. 12. [2] Exod. xiii. 21. [3] Exod. xix. 18.

pending over every man who does not flee to Christ, and the brightness of that mercy which revelation has poured upon every opened eye, in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It exhibited that blackness of darkness, whereto the Law thrusts those who are under the covenant of works, and the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, as a reconciled Father, in the face of Jesus Christ.

Omitting the other particulars of this miraculous vision, as less immediately connected with my purpose of explaining the Abrahamic covenant, I notice

III. THE BLESSINGS WHICH THAT COVENANT INVOLVED, as they were afterwards more clearly developed to mankind in the types and prophecies of the Law, and fulfilled in the glorious Mediator of the new and better covenant, in his own blood.

Its most distinguishing, most inviting, and most precious feature, to those for whom it was devised, carried forward, and ratified once for all upon Calvary, is that of its *absolute freeness and graciousness.* It is a covenant of mercy, entirely unconditional to guilty, condemned, and helpless man. The covenant of grace, with respect to us, consists of the abso-

lute promises of God, in which the Mediator Himself—the life to be obtained by Him—the faith whereby we may be made partakers of Him, and of the benefits which his death hath purchased—perseverance in that faith—in a word, the whole salvation, with all its requisites are freely promised. This covenant was made, in order that men, dead in trespasses and sins, might be raised to spiritual life—to the communion with God which follows from such gracious being, and to the everlasting glory, wherein it is consummated. No effectual conditional covenant, could possibly be made, for life, with those who were yet dead, and to be revived through the work of its blessedness in the Redeemer upon them, applied by the Holy Spirit. They must have had life, before they could perform conditions which necessarily inferred powers of spiritual existence. The colours of the brightest rainbow are not more discernible to the eye, than the inscription which faith reads upon the covenant of redemption—mercy to man *as a sinner*—even "*Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*"[1] All short of

[1] 1 Tim. i. 2.

this would be the misery and mockery of the poor, and guilty, and wretched, and impotent creatures, lying in the sepulchre, and under the grave-stone of their iniquities; whom yet it professed to save.

It will, however, be remembered, that what is thus brought before our eyes, as our only but all-sufficient hope (God grant, as our everlasting cause of rejoicing) in the light of a provision of purely free and unconditional mercy, irrespective of all desert on our part, is yet on the part of God and Christ, a covenant of conditions and works. Each covenant, the first and the second, that of works, and that of grace, has a condition; and that condition is the same in both—perfect obedience to the holy law of God. Where then, it may be asked, lies the vast difference? where, in fact, lies the difference at all? O the depths of the mind of God! It lies essentially and palpably here. In the covenant of works, the condition of perfect obedience was required to be performed by man himself. In the covenant of grace, the same condition is proposed, as to be (or, as already) performed by a Mediator.[1] In this substitu-

[1] See Witsius on the Covenant, quoted by Goode on the Better Covenant.

tion of the person obeying the law, consists the mighty and glorious difference between the covenants—between the dispensation of death, and the dispensation of life; between that which pays the wages of sin to the transgressor —eternal death, and that wherein the gift of God is eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. He paid man's debt of *obedience*, by his perfect submission to the moral law, and exemplification of its duties, thereby bringing in an everlasting righteousness. And He paid man's debt of *punishment*, when He died as his substitute upon the hill of crucifixion. "*We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.*"[1] And, clasping Him with the hand of faith, we have, or rather we are made, (which is a nobler distinction still) the righteousness of God in Him.

In this covenant of absolute mercy, the benefits and blessings are such as flow from that wondrous union of offices which the Redeemer undertook and fulfilled for us sinful men, and for our salvation—as the *Prophet*, *Priest*, and *King* of his church. As a *Priest*, He hath

[1] Col. i. 14.

made the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. "*Hath entered, not by the blood of bulls and of goats, but by his own blood into the holy place; having obtained eternal redemption,*"[1]—in the *means*, for all—and in the *actual right*, for all who believe: and therefore they who thus hang only on his cross, may draw nigh in full assurance of faith. For the sake of that glorious Priest, and of that inestimable Sacrifice which he offered, God hath said concerning all who come to Him, "*I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more.*"[2] Come thus to Him, and enjoy the mercies of this the fundamental office of the only Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Contemplate now the blessings arising from the Redeemer's *prophetical* office, as they belong to any member of his mystical body, through faith. He teaches not as the philosopher, the orator, the rhetorician teaches. He will not mock you by speaking of the innate beauty of virtue, and the bright constellation of excellences exhibited by the mind and heart

[1] Heb. ix. 12. [2] Heb. viii. 12.

of natural man. He will testify of Himself; He will put into your hearts the word that maketh wise unto salvation, through faith in Him, by the arm of his Almighty power, even as when He called Matthew, and Omnipotence went with the command. When He cries, "Know the Lord," every one, into whose heart He sends that voice, shall know Him, even from the greatest to the least. He will instruct rightly concerning God, rightly concerning sin, and open to the view of man's admiring soul, the fulness of God's salvation in Himself.

Regard Him in his *kingly* office. He is engaged to set up his own government in his brethren; that they may love the Lord their God with all their soul, and all their strength: that they may fear the Lord, and keep his ordinances, and his statutes, and his commandments to do them. He will lay the sceptre of Almightiness upon their sinful affections, to subdue them: He will bestow upon them the abundance of spiritual peace. He will give them victory over tempters and temptations. He will pour out upon them the Holy Spirit, with all the sanctification, and all the comfort, which this inestimable subject of New Testament promise

was royally appointed by Him in the covenant to produce, wheresoever He enters the heart. He will gather the mind's affections around Himself; and reign in meek and gracious sovereignty over them all. He will unite every believer to Himself; and of all so gifted with this ineffably gracious oneness, it hath been already testified, on the part of Jehovah, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." "*I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*"[1] He will effectually turn them to the love and obedience of his holy commands; making the law of God their delight, according to his own gracious undertaking. "*This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts.*"[2] In Him they are justified, in Him they are sanctified, in Him they walk before God in newness of life; in Him they persevere in holiness; and at length through God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity, after their final victory over death, the grave, and hell.

[1] 2 Cor. vi. 18. [2] Heb. viii. 10.

The rich and varied blessings involved in the covenant mercy, are such as "*eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive*," [1] save only in the Gospel, where this fountain of life is opened. The Holy Ghost hath stamped his own seal upon it, in every part of the Divine word. The Covenant of salvation by grace through faith,—God's own gift as a part of the salvation, runs, like a golden thread through all the pages of the Bible. The breach of the first covenant left us all burdened with a debt of poverty, misery, sin; with a burden of curses from the law's condemnation, which every effort of our own to remove—even if man's natural and unconverted heart had wished to remove, it would have been only continually increasing, by increasing our sum of transgression. But He is freely given to our necessities, as made of God unto all who accept Him, "*wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*" [2]

There is no help, no justification, nothing but wrath, and woe, and death, if we remain under the covenant of works. Who then

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 9. [2] 1 Cor. ii. 90.

among you is in this condemnation? Have you considered what you will do, if God thus find you at the last? Can you meet death, judgment, eternity, without Christ? It may be you have long rejected Him, and yet He offers Himself to you still: and though the sins of this denial "*have been as scarlet, yet shall they be white as snow; though they have been red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*" [1] Will your covenant with the law, which, alas, is only a covenant for eternal woe, be a better possession than one made by God in Christ, to supply all your spiritual need, and all your temporal wants also, as may be best for the family of God? No: the devil himself—the author and father of lies, although he may try thus to persuade you, believes not his own suggestion. O cast off his allurement: close your ears against him: and let me adjure you, by the authority of God, by the commands of the Holy Ghost, by the invitations of Jesus Christ, and by the depths of his mercy, to take Him by faith, and with Him all the blessings of Abram's faith, and Abram's covenant of life.

[1] Isaiah i. 38.

END OF VOL. I.

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